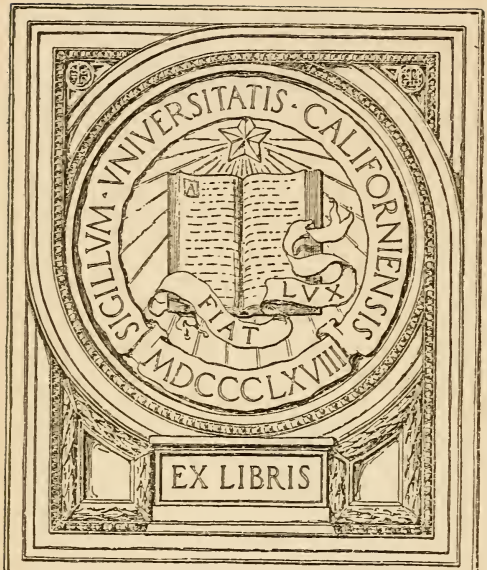
The Forge of Clohogue

A Story of '98

James Murphy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THE FORGE OF CLOHOGUE

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FORGE OF CLOHOGUE:

A STORY OF

THE REBELLION OF '98

BY

JAMES MURPHY

Author of "Lays and Legends of Ireland," "The Flight from the Cliffs," "Hugh Roach, the Ribbonman," "The House on the Rath," "The Shan Van Vocht," &c.

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PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION.

THE singular favour with which "Hugh Roach the Ribbonman" has been received by the Irish public has induced me to issue the present volume—the second of the series.

It is intended to commemorate in attractive form the bravery and dauntlessness of the gallant Wexfordmen in the stormy days of '98. The old people who bore the brunt of the struggle, and from whose lips I heard, around the winter fire, in earliest boyhood, the stories of the Rebellion, are dead and gone—and, I grieve to say it, with many in Ireland their high courage and manful bearing are fast becoming dim traditions.

Partly, my mind being thus filled with the scenes of the Rebellion, and more, I dare say, from the fact that the stories mine ears first hearkened to were associated with it, nearly all my novels have reference to that eventful period. The "Forge of Clohogue" is one of them.

Whether or not the freedom of our land can be achieved by peaceful means, or whether the exigencies of European conflict shall make it possible—or imperative—some day for Irishmen to stand with arms in their hands, is alone known to God; but in any case it can do no harm and much good to have the story of the bold uprising of the Wexfordmen told once more. The brave hearts, long laid to rest in the graveyards of their fair southern valleys—fairest and dearest to me of all that God's sunlight shines down upon!—taught by their lives two lessons worth some trouble to teach the youth of Ireland even now:—the great lessons of lofty unselfish patriotism and self-sacrificing dauntlessness.

The deeds of good men, it is said, live after them; and it is possible that the growing generation shall learn a brighter and bolder spirit of patriotism from the freshly-told story of those who conquered at Oulart Hill and stormed the Three Bullet Gate at Ross—nameless and forgotten though their graves may be.

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"The fields where our fathers triumphed over a beaten foe," though not rare in Ireland are not so numerous as to permit us to forget those whereon, less than ninety years ago, they displayed the unparalled bravery of their race and performed deeds of valour worthy of the proudest days of ancient Greece or Rome. If Irish History may not be taught in our schools, the next best thing is to teach it by way of story and romance; and if the "Forge of Clohogue" shall have contributed to this end—if it shall help to keep the memory of those times green in Irish hearts, or shall induce young people to read in more detail the lives of the true-hearted men who moved in them—it will have amply repaid the writer for his trouble.

Feb., 1885.

PREFACE TO PRESENT EDITION.

The astonishing popularity with which the "Forge of Clohogue" has been received has never been equalled by any work published in Ireland. It is over a quarter of a century since it was first issued, and the demand continues as great now as then. In particular is this the case with America. To supply this continuous and ever-increasing demand the present Edition has been brought forth.

JAMES MURPHY.

May, 1912.

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THE

FORGE OF CLOHOGUE:

A STORY OF THE REBELLION OF '98.

CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERIOUS VISITOR.

"HALLO! you there! Come back!"

The wayfarer was pursuing his way over the snowy reaches bordering the Slaney. The snow lay thick and crispy on the ground where it had fallen during the day, and where the freezing north wind was now hardening it into the consistency of iron.

It was Christmas Eve, and the dusk was descending rapidly—had descended, indeed, but that the reflection of the snow made it still lightsome.

He turned, as the voice fell on his ears, and looked round in rather a startled manner to see who was hailing him.

To his surprise, however, there was no one within range of his vision. The wide field through which he was making his way lay white and speckless around him, its white covering of snow dimmed by no form or shadow.

"That's very odd," he thought, as his eye fell on the wide waste of snow. "I certainly thought I heard a voice calling. It is old times, I daresay, that are crowding my mind with fancies. I must keep my head clearer. Four years is a long time."

The wayfarer resumed his walk. Truth to say, it was more a stride than a walk: and from his stooped crouched-up position and quick movements, it was evident that he wished to get clear of his present location, and with as little observation from others as possible.

Quickening his steps, he passed swiftly across the swamp-plain that lay before him, anxious, apparently, to get within shelter of the thick hedges that lay beyond it.

"If I could reach Clohogue before the night is far advanced, or before"—But the current of his thoughts was sharply broken by the voice repeating again:

"Hallo! you there! Don't go! Come back!"

Again the words rang in his ear. This time clearly and unmistakably. There was no fancy in his hearing this time.

His feet stopped in their stride; the thread of his thoughts broke abruptly across as he turned sharply round.

As before, there was no form within sight, the white snow-covered ground showed no sign of fellow traveller.

"Who calls? Who speaks?"

He called aloud sharply, for the incident had annoyed him. He had walked many miles, and it was only here—here, where of all other places, he wished to avoid observation—that his presence became noticed or heeded.

There was no reply to his query, cried aloud. It wasted itself in the dusk, and remained unanswered.

"Who calls? Who speaks?"

Surprised and irritated, he repeated the question again.

He waited a second or two, but no answer broke the silence.

"This is very odd," he thought. "I certainly heard the voice. There could be no mistake about it. Yet there can be no person within calling distance, else I should see him. It is very odd—very."

He paused a moment to reflect on the matter, and possibly also to listen if the voice repeated itself. But the dusky air was silent—no voice broke the stillness.

"Well, I never was, even before leaving home, very superstitious, and my life since has not tended much in that direction. But certainly, this is very odd—very."

"Stay," thought he again. "Is it not somewhere here the old quarry used to be, long ago? Surely it is, now that I remember, and in this very field too. It must be there the voice came from. I cannot have seen it in the dip of the field."

With which reflection he walked quickly back in the direction where the subject of his thoughts lay.

Arrived at its brink, however—which previously had been hidden from him by the wreathing snow—he failed to see any indication of human being in its depths. Here and there

tall clumps of rushes and whin bushes partly relieved the otherwise unbroken surface of snow; but there was no sign of life.

"That is sufficient," he said, as he glanced around. "There is no one here. My ears *must* be deceiving me. Still it is very odd."

Determined, however, to be misled by his senses no further, he resumed his walk—this time with greater speed and rapidity than before—had soon cleared the field, had crossed into the open, and in the space of an hour's rapid walking by the most hidden and unfrequented routes, stood sheltering himself under the hedge, and in front of the forge of Clohogue.

But all the time of his walking, and even whilst he stood patiently sheltering himself from observation, his thoughts rang on the words he had heard:—

"Hallo, you there! Don't go. Come back!"

"It is very odd; but I certainly thought I heard these words. Is it possible I could be mistaken? What did they mean?"

CHAPTER II.

CHRISTMAS EVE AT THE CROSSES.

I DON'T know whether it was that the forge fire burned more brightly this particular night than on other nights, or whether it is a characteristic of forges in general to throw their light more intensely outwards on very dark nights than on very bright ones. Possibly it is.

But at any rate on this snowy night the fire on the raised stone hearth, as the great bellows fanned and kindled its gleaming cinders, grew into redder heat; and the fiery sparks from the anvil, as the naked arms of the smith struck and struck at the white hot iron thereon, flashed their glowing brilliancy with greater effect than certainly seemed to be the case on any other occasion.

At least, so it seemed to the hiding form shivering in the angle of the hedge outside, opposite, as he watched the

reflected light of the fire on the roof and sides of the forge, and the circling rays of sparks, as they burst from the anvil under the falling hammer of the blacksmith.

Possibly it was because he was so miserable, cold, and shivering. Possibly because the cold snow and melting icicles from the bushes overhead fell on his neck—his bare, uncovered neck—and dripping icily down his back, added to his previous chilliness and discomfort, not to speak of the fact that for an hour or more he had been standing in an inch or so of melted snow-water.

Or, possibly also, it might have been that the bright fire recalled to him past scenes of happiness on Christmas Eve, when the bright fire gleamed on the hearth long since wanting his presence, and eyes looked glad and happy that had since been dimmed with weeping for his absence.

Whatever it was, however, the watcher paid but little attention to it, nor yet to his uncomfortable position, for his interest was fixed entirely on the forge and the moving forms therein, as they passed and repassed betewen him and the light.

"Ay! that's Mehaul—Mehaul-na-Corriga—himself. How little he has changed these four years! And who's that at the other side? Why, that's Ned the Thresher, as I am living! And he that is now striking the anvil? That is—that is—but I cannot recollect his name, though his form is so familiar to me.

"How little change, after all, four years make. There is the forge the same—in everything unchanged as last time I saw it. There is the old broken scythe-blade sticking out from the thatch as it did some seventeen years ago, when I first saw it. And there's the bellows, and the anvil, and the vice inside, just as they were. Aye, and the circular trough for cooling the car-wheels is there too outside, just the same. Nothing altered; a thousand years might pass over and leave them all unchanged.

"I wonder am I altered? I hope and trust I am; I should not care to be recognised. I believe nothing changes so much as man himself.

"How bright that fire glows, and how cold I am. I wish they were gone, and that I could see Mehaul. Will they never separate? Christmas Eve, too; he used not to work

so late. Ah! He has thrown the horse-shoe into the water and taken the iron out of the fire. They will soon break up now. They have let the fire out. I actually feel colder since they did.

"Yes, they are scattering; I shall soon know all about Knock-na-Raheen, thank God! after four long years."

His excited mind, over the restless tormenting of which he had no power, and under the influence of which his head and shoulders moved in corresponding excitement, had one present effect, if none other. It caused him with sudden start to strike against the overhanging bushes—icicle clad and snow-laden—and to bring down upon himself—upon his bare shoulders and neck—a shower of frozen snow.

"I couldn't stand this much longer," he thought, as for the first time he noticed how cold, how intensely cold his feet were, and that he had been standing all the time in the frozen water.

"Would it not have been better to have called to Knock-na-Raheen at once?"

This consideration arose to his mind, but after a brief thought he dismissed it.

"No, it would lead to exposure, ruin, disgrace, and probably——. No matter. It is better not.

"'Hallo! you there. Don't go. Come back!' Was it not strange about these words? Who could have called them after me? Or could I have imagined them? It almost makes me believe in the old story that the Quarry was haunted.

"Yes, they're breaking up at last. That's Mehaul-na-Corriga himself. That's Ned the Thresher and Shamus Morrissey. I wish I could speak with him even."

The lights in the forge disappeared, and with them his reflections, as the men came out into the night air.

They had, as he saw, closed the forge for the night. Not *closed* it, indeed; for who ever saw a country forge with its door shut, or with one to shut? But work for the night was suspended; the fire on the raised hearth was quenched; black cinders replaced the glowing flame; the red hot iron hissed for the last time in the seething water; the heavy hammer was thrown aside into a corner; the bellows ceased from its labours, and lay still, large and black in the dark-

ness ; and the group of men, young and old, on business, or assembled for gossip—for the forge at night was the rendezvous of all the men in the neighbourhood—came out from the darkness and the warmth into the bitter cold of the night air, whence they speedily scattered to their several homes.

Not all, however, for two or three, of whom one was the blacksmith, repaired not to their homes but to the crossroads, not very far distant.

Here, with its whitewashed walls, facing the main road that led to the town of Enniscorthy—and in another direction to the town of New Ross—with its low, heavy eave of thatch, overhanging so far as to afford comfortable shelter from the rain beneath it, was the publichouse.

It stood alone and isolated, for, with the exception of the forge and some farmers' houses scattered at some distance around it, there were none other in the immediate neighbourhood.

Lonely, however, as it stood, it was by no means desolate-looking. Quite the contrary. Its bright whitewashed walls showed cheerfully even against the surroundings of snow, the fire gleamed brightly on the open hearth, as one could see from its reflection in the window, and in the glistening row of copper vessels that hung on the dresser, acting as so many reflectors ; and where the red curtains screened the parlour, there also could the bright light be seen gleaming through the chinks and folds. Verily, a most inviting place of a winter's night, and in striking contrast with the cold and cheerlessness of the outside.

It was no wonder, therefore, that the blacksmith and his three companions found their way into its cheerful interior.

The publichouse, indeed, did not depend entirely upon its customers for its prosperity. The business was only an adjunct to the farm which belonged to it, as might be seen from the comfortable, well-thatched cluster of "stacks" of corn that filled the haggard to the right, separated from the road by a high wall, and from whose eaves, as indeed from the thatched eave of the house itself, the long icicles depended.

To the left was an orchard, the trees whereof in the summer time bore abundance of those beautiful old Irish apples, the moss apple and the Crofton, of which, I believe, there now

remain no descendants. Rich, melting, and honied to the taste, they had, it would seem, drunk all their sweetness from the rich breast of Irish earth, as well as from the soft mists, the rainbowed mists, of Irish airs; and their red and white hues from the glowing and genial Irish sun.

None of their like are to be found in the land now-a-days. More's the pity!

We have taken some pains to sketch this wayside hostelry, and should have elaborated the sketch, but, that we dread to delay our readers. Its form is very familiar to us; and many a summer's day, tired, after "whipping" the gentle river that, flowing from the recesses of Mount Leinster, takes its wandering way to join the Slaney, we have sat on the seat beside the door; and underneath the sheltering eave, rested by the hour, and quaffed of the right good beverage that was retailed within, whilst rod and spear reposed idly by.

"It's freezin' hard, Peggy, agra," said the blacksmith, entering, a piece of broken icicle that he had snapped across from the eave dripping in his hand.

"Faix, an' so it is," said the landlady thus familiarly addressed.

"An' likely to snow more," said the blacksmith.

"Sorra bit; but I'm afeared it'll be a white Christmas," said the landlady.

"If it snows to-night, no fear but it will. The ground is so hard wid the frost it won't melt aisy."

"There is," said the landlady, glancing out towards the road, whereon the black tracks through the snow showed its whiteness more contrastedly, "enough of id on the ground already, if it was the will of God. It will be a hard time on the poor."

"So it will, assented the blacksmith, "its 'perishing as it is. Have you a fire in the parlour?"

"Ay, faix, Mehaul, a fire that 'ud roast a bull," said the landlady, cheerfully.

"Musha, more power to yer four bones," said the blacksmith gaily, taking hold of the landlady by the two shoulders, and giving her an approving shake. "The light ov glory to yer sowl! 'twas yourself, ever an' always, had the warm house for sthranger or neighbour."

"I'm behouldn' to you for your good word, Mehaul."

"Not a bit. 'Tis the thruth I'm tellin'. Sorra cowld or misery there ever was in yer house no more nor there's in your face, an' that's not much."

"I'd never like to deny God's goodness in my house or anywhere else."

"No more you don't. But tell me, Peggy. Have you any of the——?"

"Arrah, to be sure I have," said the hostess, interrupting, understanding and answering him at the same time.

"The very same?"

"The very identical same."

"That we brought from——?"

"Yes—yes. The very same."

"That you may never want plenty to give nor the heart to give it, Peggy," said Mehaul, heartily, "and send us up a quart ov it. Don't mind the price ov id. Let it be the best."

"An' d'ye think I'd put you in my pocket for the price av it?" said the hostess, in good-natured indignation. "Faix, you're welcome to the best in the house; an' it's glad I am you called, an' the dacent boys that's wid you. Isn't it Christmas times, an' aint I glad to see you in the house? Aye, faix, an' these boys that I knew since afore they were able to walk."

And so saying, the landlady walked up to the parlour, which was at the back of the centre wall that contained the fireplace, and led from the kitchen by a small door to the left, joining on the back wall of the kitchen; and with her went Mehaul the blacksmith and his three companions.

The appearance of the room did not belie the hostess's words.

A huge fire of black "hand turf," trampled and kneaded on the bog of Mullawn-a-skeogh into the hardness and consistency of coal, blazed on the ample hearth and roared up the chimney, encompassed by a fringe of ashes white as the snow outside.

Its blaze and brightness lit up the room, even without the aid of the candle she carried; and the pleasant heat it diffused made the compartment seem, in contrast with the bleak world outside, the very acme of comfort.

"Now, that's what I call pleasant," said the blacksmith,

surveying the fire and the white walls upon which the blazing fire threw quaint shadows, "that's what I call comfort."

"Its better than the cowld snow, anyhow," said the pleasant and hospitable landlady.

"Better! It's better than anything I know of. Here, boys, dhraw over your chairs. Pull over that table, an bring it near the fire. It's Christmas time, boys; and sorra fut we'll stir from this till the moon rises, and that'll be midnight, I'm thinkin.' Peggy agra, the——"

"I'll have it in a minit's spakin'," said the landlady, who, as soon as she saw them comfortably settled, went on her errand.

She soon returned with a quart jug, filled with liquor, in one hand, and a steaming kettle of boiling water in the other.

"There, now, Mehaul, avic; an' you boys, there's as good licker as ever was christened——"

"Faix you might swear that on a bag of bibles," said the blacksmith, interrupting.

"An' there's hot water, an' there's the fire, and here's (taking down a bowl of loaf sugar from a cupboard in the recess) sugar. An' faix if you don't make yerselfs comfortable now it isn't my fault—that's all."

"Begorra, you may say that. You might thravel from here to Carman's Hall, in the big city of Dublin, an' you wouldn't meet its match," said the smith, as he settled himself comfortably beside the fire, and proceeded to mix the contents.

"An' now I'll lave yez to yerselfs."

"Sorra fut you'll go till you'll take a drop ov this wid us," said the smith, catching her arm in the highest of good humour.

"Oh, now, Mehaul," appealed, half-laughingly, the hostess.

"Oh, sorra now or then it is, but you must," said the smith, still holding her hand firmly with one of his, whilst with the other he mixed the steaming beverage.

Which he did in this wise:—First he poured a quantity of the hot water into a large earthenware jug that stood on the table. Then he carefully dissolved the sugar. Then he emptied portion of his quart of liquor into this; then he refilled the quart of liquor with the mixture, once more

filled the water jug, and in this way kept on intermixing until he had two jugs of steaming punch whose aroma filled the apartment, adding thereto a further sense of ease and comfort.

"Sorra a fut you'll stir out av this till you dhrink that," said the blacksmith handing her a tumbler of the grateful liquor.

"I'll taste it for you to plaze you, Mehaul, but I won't dhrink it. What I never done in my life I'm not going to do now, an' that's to dhrink a tumbler-full."

"Faix and you'll do more nor taste id, anyhow," said the smith, "an' more betoken you'll not dhrink id alone, for we'll all join you. An' d'ye know what?" said he, as he poured out the steaming fluid into four other tumblers.

"What?"

"Could you guess?"

"No; how could I?" asked the lady, as she held in her unwilling fingers the hot tumbler.

"Be the tares o' war! an' I'll tell you. We'll dhrink the health av one you know, that's far away; and that the Christmas may be as happy an' pleasant to him as it is to us wherever he is! Be the powers of Moll Davy! he didn't lave his likes behind him between Bran Mor and the say."

The hostess's face grew pale, her fingers trembled in their hold on the tumbler, and her eyes filled instantaneously with tears as he concluded his words.

"Oh, Mehaul, why did you mention it? Sure it's the sorra an' the thrubble the thought of him always brings to my heart."

"An' so he ought. For it isn't that I say id to your face, but the sorra likes of himself he left behind. An' so, in the name ov God, this Christmas time, we'll dhrink the poor boy's health, an' good luck an' the hoith ov health an' prosperity to him wherever he is, an' confusion to his enemies! Amen."

The smith raised the tumbler to his lips; but he quickly, without tasting it, lowered it again, as the sound of wheels was heard outside, and a hasty knock came to the door.

"Who's that? It's a mighty loud knock."

"I don't know. Maybe it's Squire Stanford come from Ross," said the hostess, pausing and listening.

"Or the priest on a sick call," said one of the young men. "Poor Nell Commons was very bad to-night, I heard."

"It's not him," said the smith. "He wouldn't drive so hard."

"If it's not it is the doctor," said the youth who had before spoken.

"Maybe it is. Like enough," said the smith.

"Anyhow, I'll see," said the hostess, brushing her tears aside with the corner of her apron, and placing her untasted tumbler hurriedly on the table. "Kitty, an' the girls are in the dairy, an' they won't hear the knockin', so I may as well go myself and open——"

The hurried knocking was repeated with loud and impatient force; and the hostess interrupting her statement, hurried from the kitchen, and thence to the door.

As she withdrew the bolt that fastened it the voice of a man, speaking angrily, fell on the listeners' ears in the parlour.

"Why the d——l did you not open at once?"

The landlady apologised, but her words failed to reach their ear.

"This is a nice way to treat a traveller, wet and cold, a smothering with snow! Oh! I beg your pardon, I thought it was a man that opened the door."

"You ought to know that there is no man in the house—belongin' to it, at any rate, Mr. Gordon."

"So I ought. That is what surprised me—when I thought there was! Surely I ought. Who better? Have you got anything to drink?"

"Yes, your honour, I have. Will you take it here, or will you step up in the parlour."

"Is there a fire there?"

"There is."

"Well, then, perhaps I will. Charley, will you tie the reins to the hook of the door, and come inside. We won't delay long."

His companion stepped down from the seat, shook the snow from his hat and coat, and stepped inside.

"Maybe your honour would rather stay here. I'll bring you the drink in a minit. What would your honour like?"

"Spirits; let us have two tumblers, full. And that puts me in mind, Charley, that perhaps we had better give the horse a feed."

"Yes," assented his companion, "it's a long drive from

Enniscorthy, and we have a good distance to go. Perhaps it is better."

"Yes, I think it is. No," he added, in answer to a second question from the hostess as to whether he would not prefer sitting at the kitchen fire whereon the blazing turf glowed. "No; we'll take it in the parlour"—whither he proceeded.

The hostess had quite forgotten when courteously inviting him to go to the latter apartment that it was already occupied and for reasons which may develop themselves further on, hesitated to see him, under the circumstances, enter there.

With a quick, impetuous step he proceeded from the kitchen to the apartment, through the door already mentioned, and entered.

His step hesitated for a second as he entered the door, and he seemed, as his eye fell on those around the fire, as if he were about to withdraw again.

But he changed his mind, if he really entertained the idea, and advanced towards the fire.

It might have been the submissive motion of those around the fire that encouraged him to do so, for as he entered they moved their seats by a simultaneous motion away, to make room for him.

Whereupon he advanced to the fire, and placing the toe of his heavy top boot on the stone hearth, rested his heavy riding whip on it, and throwing back his outside coat let the warm blaze fall on his face and breast and legs.

"It's a cold night."

"So it is, yer honour; a cowld night for dhrivin'."

"And likely to snow more."

"Sorra doubt av id. We'll have a heavy fall afore mornin'."

"Is there much snow on the roads to Clonroche?"

"I'm tould it's heavier nor it is here."

"Ah."

The newcomer, as he stood gazing into the fire, seemed to be a man of about five or six and thirty years of age. A heavy moustache (then very unusual, particularly in country places) depended over his mouth, and a thick short mass of beard covered his chin, made slightly irregular, however, by a cicatrice extending from the corner of his mouth transversely across his chin, the remnant apparently of an old wound.

His form was burly and muscular, somewhat above the

middle height, and gave an idea of strength more than of activity. His eyes, small and restless, withdrew themselves quickly from the fire, and he glanced downwards at the breast of his undercoat.

He had thrown his overcoat wide open to give himself the full benefit of the genial fire, and as he did so there protruded from the pocket, at which he glanced, the glistening stock of one of the long-barrelled pistols then in use. And as he glanced thitherwards the eyes of the others glanced thither also.

"I suppose there is no difficulty in travelling?"

"Unless the ice is on the roads, not much."

"And my horse's shoes are not cocked. I suppose the forge is——. By the way," as he turned to take the tumbler from the hostess's hand, "you are the smith. You are Mehaul-a-gow—aren't you?"

"I am—I'm Mehaul-a-gow."

"You wouldn't think bad of coming and 'roughing' the horse's shoes, would you?"

"Faix an' I would," said the smith, in no wise disposed to leave his comfortable surroundings. "Yis, begorra, an' so I would. The forge fire is black out this hour and more."

"You could light it again."

"Sorra hand or fut I'll put near it to-night," said the smith bluntly.

"You might do worse."

"I might an' better. A day's work is enough for any man."

The traveller glanced at him with a peculiar expression of countenance. It might be surprise, or it might be malignity; but as it was unseen by the person to whom it was directed it passed unheeded.

The smith, as if to recoup himself for the amount of determination expended in this refusal, took off his tumbler of whiskey-punch, but those of the others remained untasted.

"Take off that, Charley," said the traveller to his companion, as the latter entered to say the horse was fed.

His companion, who was much younger than himself, stood before the fire silently, and tossed off his tumbler also. A second was called for by him, which both drank off in

complete silence; and then, buttoning up their overcoats, they made a motion to go.

The traveller, standing at the door of the parlour, as if in consideration, turned round and said—

"The sewer at Moyraan is burst, and the water flows across the road. It is likely to be frozen over for some distance and my horse cannot cross it." Then after a pause—

"May I take a hammer from the forge as we pass? If it is frozen we can break the ice with it."

Mehaul, who had been following him with his eyes, as he left the apartment, said—

"To be sure you can, an' welkim."

In a few minutes they heard the sound of the wheels grating on the road outside the door, and a little later they were on the snow further on, completely lost to hearing.

The hostess bolted the door, and the incident was over.

CHAPTER III.

THE GHOST OF THE FORGE.

"It's a quare time he's thravellin', Mehaul," said one of the young men.

"He thinks so himself, too. Did you see what he carries in his breast pocket?"

"Ay, an' another in his side pocket."

"I didn't see that."

"Faix an' he had."

"What's bringin' him now?"

"Oh, what but the ould business."

"I suppose so. God help the crathurs he has to do wid."

"Ah, you may say that."

"Musha," said Mehaul, after a pause, during which he once more replenished the tumblers, "hadn't he the face to kum into this house?"

"Aye, after the——"

"Spake aisy. Don't let her hear you. I'll be bound she's cryin' her eyes out at the kitchen fire. Signs on id, good raison she has."

"Well, if I was him," said the young fellow who had spoken, "I'd not kum here anyhow. It might be thrue, or it might not be thrue; but for all that—— "

"Thrue!" said Mehaul, flinging the remnant of his tumbler into the red turf, where it burst into a sudden blaze of blue light, "be the tares of war I'll never b'lieve there was a word of thruth in it."

"He wouldn't go for to——"

"I don't know what he would or he wouldn't do, but it'll kum to light some time or another, an' you'll find what I say is thrue. Divil a hand, act, or part (God forgie me for cursin') Watt ever had to do wid it"

"Well, someone made away wid Dick-na-Raheen, anyhow."

"I'm not sayin' agin' that," said the smith, sinking his voice to a whisper as they drew their chairs closer to the fire. "I'm not sayin' agin that at all. Maybe they did an' maybe they didn't."

"Why! how could you say maybe they didn't? Wasn't the hat found on the bank? Wasn't the new scythe handle found all covered wid blood?"

"I said I wasn't denyin' that," said Mehaul; "though for the matter of that, that was all that was found. The corpse wasn't found."

"Faix it wouldn't be aisy to find it—God between us an' all harm. There wasn't such a flood in the Slaney since, an' that's four years ago."

"Supposin' there wasn't an' supposin' the body went down wid id to the say, who was to prove that young Watt had any hand in it?"

"Except *him*."

"Ay, except him."

"Well; he wouldn't swear in the wrong—would he?"

"I dunno whether he would or not. Only what I say is this: a man that's constantly swearin' day afther day, first as an attorney, an' agin as a tithe proctor, sorra much I'd give for his oath, if he had a raison for swearin'."

"It's thrue for you, Mehaul-a-gow, for whin"—but the words of the new speaker were stopped in his mouth, as the wheels of a car were heard driving rapidly from Clohogue, and stopping suddenly before the door, on which a tremendous rap—twice repeated—suddenly broke.

The smith paused in the act of raising the tumbler to his lips, and laid it down again, untasted on the table.

"Begorra, that's a loud knock, anyway. There's somewan in a hurry."

"Hush," said Mehaul, listening. "We can't hear if you spake."

The door was soon opened, and the traveller, passing quickly into the patlour, stood before them.

It was the same youth who had accompanied the late traveller, and he seemed in a very excited condition. The drops of perspiration stood thick on his forehead, and his whole appearance bespoke terror and alarm; so much so, indeed, that for a moment or two he could not give utterance to his words.

As he stood panting before them the smith interrupted the silence by saying:

"Where is 'Torney Gordon?"

"He is dead," said the young man, finding words, the query of the other having broken the spell that kept him tongue-tied.

"Dead!" said the smith in sudden terror, as, pushing, the chair from him, he rose to his feet.

"Dead!" said the others, following his example.

"Dead! Where?"

"In the forge."

"In the forge," repeated the youth, the only words he was able to repeat.

"D'ye mane the forge of Clohogue? *My forge*?

"I believe it is yours," answered the youth.

"What happened him?"

"I don't know. He went in for a hammer, and he didn't come out. When I went in I found him——"

"Found him?"

"Found him lying there; and then I came back as fast as I could."

"God bless us; what could have happened him?"

"I tell you what, boys," said Mehaul, "he's only after fallin' over somethin', and been stunned. He's not dead—sorra dead; but kum along, boys, we'll soon find out."

"Do, for God's sake. Come quick," said the youth, in great excitement and trepidation.

The men, leaving their tumblers behind them, rushed from the parlour, through the kitchen, and into the night air.

"Boys," said Mehaul, as they passed through the kitchen, "bring a candle wid yez; we'll want it; the night is dark, an' the forge will be pitch dark."

The three men ran forward as quickly as they could. It was no easy matter to run, for the snow on the road slipped under their feet, or clogged under their boots; but nevertheless they reached the forge before the traveller was able to unfasten his trap, climb into it, and, driving hard, get up with them.

"Boys, who has the candle?"

"Here it is, Mehaul," said the one who had stayed behind to get it, and who, being a swift runner, had overtaken them at the forge almost as soon as the trap had arrived.

"Strike a match an' light it," said Mehaul. "Hould your hat over it the way it won't go out. Now you have it. Come on."

Armed with the light they entered the forge. A hasty glance around assured Mehaul there was no disturbing element there. Save the weird shadows thrown by the uplifted blower of the bellows, and the hob of the fire-place, there was nothing calculated to frighten.

Letting his eyes descend to the ground, he saw a form lying partly in the shadow thrown by the anvil.

"The Lord bless us and presarve us—this is he, sure enough. Howld the candle, Ned, while I lift him."

But previous to lifting him, the smith, who combined with his profession the business of bone-setter to the neighbourhood—an office which indeed was hereditary with him, having descended from father to son through many generations in his family—felt his pulse.

"He is not dead, anyhow, Glory be to God! He's only fainted. He must have fallen agin the anvil, an' sthruck his head agin it. Bad cest to that same anvil. Hould the candle down, Ned. Sorra a mark of a fall is there anywhere," said he, as he carefully scanned his face and forhead, "an' it must be his face he sthruck agin id to fall the way he did."

The pallid face and heavy drops of perspiration that stoop

on the unconscious man's forehead betokened that something very singular had happened.

"What's to be done?" asked the youth, alarmed at the expression on his late companion's face when the light of the candle fell upon it.

"I'll tell you what's to be done," said Mehaul quickly. "Bring in a handful of snow."

The snow was immediately brought, and the smith, taking it in his hand, applied it to his forehead, rubbing it hard. Then he threw open his coats, out of one of which the silver mounted pistol fell.

"Here, take that. It's not wantin' here," said the smith, handing it to the youth, and then tearing open his shirt-breast he applied the cold snow there also.

"He's comin' to," said the smith, looking up at the crowd of faces that bent over him, watching the process with eagerness. "He's openin' his eyes. It's only a weakness he took."

"He's sayin' something," said one of the spectators, seeing that his lips moved.

"So he is," says the smith. "God save us! did you ever see such eyes? What are you sayin? What happened you?" he asked again of the recovering traveller.

"Where am I?"

"Where are you, is it? Faix, you're in the Forge of Clohogue. Sorra more nor less."

The man threw his eyes at the faces bending down over him with a look of intense fear and astonishment depicted thereon, and then into the darkness around, from which, however, he withdrew them immediately in affright.

Motioning to the smith to bend down, he whispered in a voice weak with emotion and faintness:—

"Is it gone?"

"Is what gone?"

"It. The—the—ghost."

"The ghost! God between us and all harm. What 'ud bring a ghost here? What ghost?"

"His."

"His! Whose?"

"Dick-na-Raheen."

"Dick-na-Raheen! The blessing of God be about us, what put that in your head?"

"What put that in your head, Mr. Gordon?" asked Mehaul again, as the other closed his eyes with an effort as if to exclude some affrighting vision.

"I saw him here," said the traveller, again opening his eyes, whilst the terror seemed to drive their sight inwards.

"Here! Where?"

"There," motioning to the place where the shadow of the large bellows lay heavy and dark.

"Give me that candle, Ned, for a second," said the blacksmith; and, taking the light, he walked quickly around the forge.

Nothing met his eye, however, but broken ploughs sent for repair or cart-wheels needing new rims; and having made the circuit of the stone fire-place he returned again.

"There's nothing there now, at any rate."

"Look at this, Mehaul," said Ned, laying his hand on the hearthstone of the forge. "Someone has been here since we left."

"Let me see. No; I think not. It is the wind blowin' in through the door that has swept it clean. That's what it is," said the smith.

"It is not," said Ned, decisively; "there was somebody restin' there, warmin' himself."

"No fear ov it," said Mehaul contemptuously. "It was the wind, I tell you."

"It wasn't the wind lighted the fire," said Ned contradictorily.

"Where is it lighted?" said the smith, glancing at the black cinders of culm, or coal.

"Put your hand on them. They're quite hot. They're not long gone out."

The smith placed his hand on the extinguished embers.

"It does seem a little hot, but the wind whirlin' in might aisily keep 'em alive for a bit after we left. It's all nonsense, there's been nobody here. But what are you goin' to do wid him—wid Mr. Gordon, I mane?" addressing the younger traveller. "He's too wake to be able to thravel very far."

"Unless back to the public-house, I don't know."

"Very well; then there's no use on airth lavin' him here any longer."

And so, lifting the patient, if we may so call him, who

seemed to be quite paralysed and unable to stand, into the trap, they proceeded at an easy pace back to the wayside hostelry.

Once there he was accommodated by the timid but reluctant hostess with a bed; the horse and trap were provided for, and the younger traveller attended on his friend, whilst the smith and his associates once more adjourned to the parlour, to partake of the punch they had so unceremoniously been twice interrupted in drinking.

The drink was cold, and a further measure with corresponding hot water was ordered; whilst the party crept close round the fire to warm themselves after their cold journey back from the forge.

"That's a mighty odd piece of business, Mehaul—isn't it?" said one of the men in a low whisper, only to be heard by the little group.

"Begorra, an' you may say it is," said the smith in an equally serious tone, proceeding to light his pipe. "He saw something for a sartinty."

"Faix, he got a fright, whatever he saw," assented the smith.

"D'ye think, Mehaul, it could be a ghost?" asked Ned in a whisper, with a cautious look around him, as if he doubted whether the apparition might not have followed them, and elected to abide during the snowy night in the parlour bright and warm rather than in the inhospitable and cheerless forge.

"Faix, I dunno. He's a man not aisy frightened. An' a morthyal bad fright he got—whatever it was."

"There was something there, anyhow," said Ned, who still persisted in his opinion.

"Faix, an' there was," assented the smith most unexpectedly.

"I thought you said there wasn't," whispered another, as one and all drew closer instantaneously to the fire, and glanced uneasily at the unshuttered windows, down which the hot air of the room was streaming in drops, making zigzag marks on the panes, not unlike, as they stood out darkly against the white world outside, fantastic faces of old withered men.

"Musha, Pether avick, would you think I'd agree to anythin' bein' seen in the forge fornint *them*?"

"An' you think there was?"

"Faix, an' I'm sure ov id. The fire was black out and cowld afore we left to come here."

"And there was something sitting on the hearthstone."

"Faix, an' there was, thrue enough," whispered the smith. "But what would be the good ov lettin' on afore *them*?"

"Thrue for you, shure enough," assented Ned, "the light ov heaven to all poor crathurs ramblin' about the airth this snowy night!"

Ned piously crossed himself, as did likewise the others.

"But Mehaul and Ned," said a third (and the nearest to the chimney corner), "sure you know av it was a sperrit it would not lave a mark. Don't we know they have no bodies? How could it lave a mark on the hearthstone?"

"Hould your tongue, Shaymus," said Mehaul in an authoritative undertone, "an' don't be talkin' ov what you know nothin' about. Don't you know very well—or if *you* don't, other people that's more knowligible do—that ghosts can do what they like, sometimes—an' just like ourselfs."

"An' what time might that be—God save us!" asked Shaymus, who being snugly ensconced in the fireplace, with his back to the recess in the wall, could safely talk of ghosts without immediate danger; for unless one came down the chimney, or put its hand through the wall at his back he could not be spirited away. If any of the dreaded body of immaterial beings came otherwise they would be more likely to seize upon one of his outer companions than on himself.

"Shure every wan knows that on All Souls' night and Christmas Eve the poor sowls have leave to cum and sit in the warmth and heat of their own house—I mane, or the houses they wanst lived in."

"D'ye think that's the truth?" asked Shaymus in a sort of cosy and safe incredulousness.

"D'ye hear what he axes?" said Mehaul, half angrily; but the entrance of the landlady with materials to replenish the vacant tumblers interrupted the conversation.

"An' what happened him, at all, Mehaul, agra?" asked she in a tone which expressed anything but pleasure at the occasion of having him for a guest.

"Faix, I dunno, Peggy, jewel," said Mehaul cautiously; "he got a wakeness on the road."

"I'm sorry for id."

"I know you are, an' faix it's no wondher; small blame to you for not likin' to have him undher yer roof this Christmas time."

"I never thought I'd shelter the man that swore agin my innocent boy," said Mrs. Malone, in a voice choking with emotion, and in which anger at the unpleasant intrusion and sorrow for the absent one seemed to be equally blended.

"Well, what's done can't be helped," said Mehaul condolingly. "An' faix I'm sorry enough for id meself. But there's no use in frettin' about it. He'll be off to-morrow."

"One night, Mehaul, aroon, is too long to be undher the roof he brought such sorra to."

"So it is, Peggy; so it is. But 'It's far away what God sinds.' That's an old maxim and a thrue wan, an' who knows what good may kum out of id yet."

"Sorra good ever came from him or his likes," said the hostess, as angrily as her generally soft good nature would permit.

As soon as she was gone, Mehaul remarked—"Faix, if she heard what *did* bring him back it's little sleep she'd get to-night, I'm thinkin'."

"It's little ov the same she'll get, whether or no," remarked Ned.

"Ay, isn't it very sthrange we should a-been talkin' about him just the very minit he was appearin' to the 'torney?"

"I wonder what brought him to appear to-night ov all nights in the year, if it was himself was in it," suggested Shaymus, anxious to return to the subjects of ghosts, of whom he was most particularly afraid.

"Sorra wan else but himself was in id," said Mehaul, thoughtfully fixing his eyes on the glowing fire; "and the saints be about us! the divil a wan else could frighten 'Torney Gordon."

"Begorra, you may say that. Be all accounts he is not aisily frightened. An', be the same token, he needn't be while he has the shooters wid him. He must ha' seen somethin' for a sartinty."

"He did that—somethin' he didn't like, too."

"Shure he done *him* no harm; he only tried to save him."

"That's his own story, Shaymus; but, boys," said Mehaul cautiously, "this is not a thing to be spakin' about, nayther in public nor in private; an' so we'ed better dhrop it. Only if there's any poor sperit goin' about wandherin' this cowld Christmas night, that God may soon open the gates ov heaven to it; that's all I say."

A hearty "Amen," fervent and pious, broke from the lips of the other three.

"What's that, boys?" asked Ned, who was on the outside of the circle, and furthest from the fire, in an excited and startled whisper.

All started. It certainly did seem as if another "Amen" from somewhere in the room, came in response to the prayer.

All looked round. There was nothing in the room; certainly no visible presence. The waning firelight threw grotesque shadows of the talkers on the walls and ceilings, but shadows and firelight-figures make no responses, not even to prayers.

Their eyes turned to the window. The streaks of condensed air still trickled down its panes, and the white world of snow gleamed outside. There was nothing there to attract attention.

"I thought I heard somebody in the room sayin' 'Amin' after us."

"So did I, but——"

"God bless us an' save us!" interrupted Shaymus, already trembling in the snug corner.

"But," continued Mehaul, "it was only an aycho; that's what it was."

"Salvation to me!" said Ned, "bud I thought it was the voice of somebody spakin' behind me."

"Maybe it was some poor Christhyan sowl abroad this famishin' night." said Peter.

"Av it was," said Shaymus, trembling even in his snug seat—with a keen remembrance, however, that a good many fields, and gaps, and styles lay between him and his home—"Av it was, I pray God, they may find shelter and comfort afore they're much longer out."

"That's a good prayer, Shaymus," said Mehaul, "an' if yez don't mind—an' if yez fill yer tumblers again—bekaise its Christmas times, you know—I'll tell yez what happened me wanst, just av a Christmas night like this, up in the Blackstairs mountains, beyant Killan, a great many years ago."

The suggestion was gratefully received. A fresh supply of turf was placed on the fire, which at once crackled and blazed up, and the grateful liquor was poured into the sparkling tumblers.

There was a weird feeling around them, that, blending into the comfortable sensations occasioned by the warm room, the glowing fire, and the cheerful liquor, made the fireside the very perfection of a snuggery.

The consciousness that they had yet to face the cold outside and all the attendant terrors of night and darkness, made them only the more disposed to enjoy the comforts they possessed and that were at hand. So, filling their pipes whilst Mehaul ladled the liquor, they prepared to enjoy themselves to the very utmost.

Mehaul was a man of powerful build. His broad massive shoulders and brawny arms but set off the large head and striking face that surmounted them; and, as his courage was well known, and had often been put to the proof, everyone was prepared to think that whatever frightened him or startled or surprised him must have been something remarkable indeed.

Moreover, he was in these uncultured days a man of much more than average intelligence; and the mysterious natural skill in surgery and herbal medicine which had descended to him through many generations of ancestors made him universally looked up to and consulted.

Wherefore his auditors prepared to listen to his narration with a confidence and an interest which they would not so readily have accorded to one of less acknowledged merit.

"'Twas ov a Christmas evenin', ov all the nights in the year, that I was kummin down from the sides of the the Blackstairs. More betoken I was out all day on the mountains wid me gun lookin' for a hare, and, as luck would have id, the sorra wan I came across the live long day. I thracked 'em here, an' I thracked 'em there—the snow was covered wid their

thracks—but begonnies! when you thraced wan sthraight to its form, the sorra hare was there—not as much as a scut.

"To make things worse, a fog kem over the mountains to'rds evenin', and sorra bit but I lost my way. There was nothin' to guide me—every rock and path that I knew so well of ould was covered wid snow. One place was like another—not a bit of differ. I wandhered about; all I knew was that I was kummin down the hill; but I could only see a few yards before me, with the fog and the snow-mists.

"I thought I couldn't help somehow making my way to Coolbawn or Killan, and that the sooner I got there the better. I was getting mortyal hungry.

"I dunno whether any of yez ever heard of the mountain hunger. I don't suppose yez did, because yez hadn't much to do wid the mountains, because you coudn't, forbye you're living too far from 'em. But I'll tell yez what it is. Here an' there, yez mightn't meet it wance in twenty years, but it's there for all that.

"It's a spot ov green grass—the greenest ever yer two eyes ever looked upon, an' if you walk over that yer lost, unless you can get somethin' to eat. A wakeness such as you never felt afore comes over you—a sthrange kind of wakeness—like the wakeness afore death.

"I felt it at wance. I had aten nothin' since breakfast, not expectin' to be on the hills so long; and the taste of whiskey I brought, faix I tossed it off long afore to warm me, for my hands wor near froze houldin' the gun.

"'I'm a dead man,' thinks I to myself. 'I've walked on the hungry grass. The saints protect me.'

"As fast as my feet could carry me I tumbled more nor walked down the mountain. I knew very well if I wance fainted there was an end ov me. I'd never see the plains of Clonroche nor the Duffrey agin.

"I think it was the fear ov that that kep me up; but I was in a most awful fright. The heart was across in my body, and the sight was a'most lavin' my eyes.

"'I'm gone now. The Blessed Virgin protect me,' said I wance, when I tumbled headlong on my face into a hollow where the tall rushes grew up a'through the snow.

"But, faix, the words were hardly out ov me mouth, an' my fall over, when the hands I had thrown out to save

meself kem on something warm, and as I did I knew I had fallen on a hare's form, an' that it was one I had undher my hand.

"I knew in the twinklin' ov an eye I was saved. The strength came into my arms again and the sight into my eyes; an' in less than it would take to put that tumbler to your lips I whips out my knife, and was soon drinkin the blood of the hare. The mountain sickness was gone—the hunger-sickness that laid many a wan dead in the fog on that same hill many a time afore.

"I leaped up with new life in me, took hould ov me gun, an' faced wance more for Coolbawn.

"But the fog darkened and darkened, and the snow began to fall, until between all together it grew as dark as pitch—blacker than the blackest night ever kum out of the heavens.

"I walked up hill afther hill and down valley afther valley, athout comin' to any place I knew, until at last I began to see I had lost my way, an' did not know where I was. And the more I walked the more I got bewildhered.

"'If it's not the blessin' of God an' His holy Mother,' says I at last, 'I'll be on the Blackstairs in the snow all night. An' if I fall asleep, God alone knows how I'll waken.'

"I was that tired that I could hardly walk any longer. Every joint in my body was as stiff as the tongs there afore you, an' it's only at last wid the help ov the gun I was able to lift myself out ov the snow when my feet sank in it.

"I tell you I was in a quare way—I was, just. It makes me shiver to think ov it this minit; though it's many years ago.

"I'm sure you'll hardly b'lieve me, but when all hope of makin' my way wor gone, what did I see but a light just forninst me?

"I fell on my knees, an' sorra many more heartier prayers I think ever wor sed afore ov a Christmas Eve.

"Sure enough! there was a light, an' shure enough there was a cabin door through which the light was sthramin; an' you may be shure I wasn't long makin' my way to it.

"There was a fire of heath-sticks burnin' on the hearth, and an ould man was sittin' at it. Part of the roof had fallin' in, and the snow lay where the roof had fallen on the floor.

"'Good night an' God save all here!' says I, makin' my way to the fire; but sorra wan of the man at the fire ever said a word.

"'God save all here!' says I again, layin' my hand on the shouldhers ov the man, who was sittin' on a boss wid his two elbows on his knees an' his face on his hands.

"He tumbled off the seat when I touched him!

"'God preserve us and save us,' says I, 'what's amiss wid you?'

"And faix, when I threw a little dhry heath that was in a corner on the fire, to give us light, I saw he was dead!

"I thried to lift him up, but I couldn't, so I placed him against the wall on a heap of dhried rushes that was in it.

"'God be marcyful to you and forgive you your sins, whoever you are, or whatever happened you,' says I in morthyal fright.

"All at wanst it struck me, maybe it was only mountain wakeness that was amiss wid him, so I lit a wisp of heath an' looked at his face. Faix it was more like a man asleep than dead, but his jaws wor all pinched and shrunken in like one that had fainted from hunger.

"'In the name ov God—an' glory be to His holy name!'—says I aloud, 'iv it can be done, I'll soon cure that.'

"As good luck would have it, there was a pot in one corner, half covered with the fallen roof. I soon filled it with snow put down a roarin' fire of heath sticks, hung the pot over it with an owld *gowlyouge* of a rafther that was among the thatch, an' as soon as the snow melted, had the hare skinned an' put into the pot.

"Begorra, before it had begun to boil, I was just goin' asleep wid the heat ov the fire and the tiredness ov my limbs when I heard a step behind me.

"A man was standing over me!

"'Good night,' says I, 'an' I'm glad you're kum. Sorra wan ever wanted kumpany worse afore.'

"But sorra word he spoke, and the fire brightned up just then, an' I saw—whilst the hair on my head stood on end, and the big drops of sweat stood out on my forehead as big as hailstones—that it was the face ov a dead man I looked upon."

"God save us an' bless us, Mehaul asthore, you don't say that?" said Shaymus, curling himself into the smallest possible compass, whilst the others moved closer to one another and to the fire.

"Wait till you'll hear," pursued Mehaul. "I moved a little aside, not knowin' what to do, and the man wid his sightless eyes an' hollow face sat down on the *boss* I had sat up from in the very same position as the former man, wid his elbows on his knees an' his face on his hands."

"Did you run away, Mehaul, aroon?" inquired Shaymus, whose excited interest could not await the conclusion of the story.

"Run away!" said Mehaul contemptuously. "Where should I run to? Out into the snow an' the blackness of the night—to die, maybe? No; I moved aside from him though I was morthially afeared, an' got a wisp of heath an' swept up the hearth afore him; put on a big fire, 'for maybe who knows,' says I to myself, 'but the poor fellow wants to warm himself this perishing Christmas night.'

"Behold you, afore I had done my work another kem an' another, an' another, all silent. An' what at the time, afeared an' all as I was, surprised me most was, every wan ov 'em got a seat to sit upon afore the fire, though exceptin' the wan I had myself, sorra seat I could see afore the fire about anywhere.

"Anyhow, in the middle of my silent company there was room enough for me to move about, an' so I watched the hare boilin'."

"I wos stirrin' it with a piece of heath root, whin all av a suddint I heard a moan.

"I looked around to see if it came from any of the heads bent down afore the fire. None av 'em stirred.

"I listened again. It came again—from somewhere about the room.

"An' just then I saw what I somehow didn't see afore—that there was a small door leadin' from the room I was in to another at the end. So, lightin' a bit of resin bogwood, I walked down (I dunno what gev me strength to do it) into the room.

"There was a heap of rushes lying there, too, an' a man

lying on id. He was dressed. I could see him at wanst different from all the other people that ever I saw.

"But he, anyhow, wasn't dead, for I saw him movin' as I enthered."

"'Are you sick, God help you?' says I. But the sorra a word, no more than the others, he answered me.

"'Begorra,' thought I, 'av it's nourishment you want you'll soon have it.'"

"And wid that I walks back to the fire where the pot was bilin', dipped down the leather cover of the bottle I carried, and took it up full of soup. The very scent of it filled the room sweeter than even the flowers sent up from the garden ov a summer's day.

"The smell of it strengthened him, for he sat up athout spakin' a word, and dhrank it off. More nor that, for he stood up, houldin' the leather cup in his hand, kem up to the fire-place, filled it himself, gev it first to the poor fellow I had laid against the wall, who woke up and dhrank it off, and then sat up; an' so on until every wan ov the four sat upright on their seats.

"I sat down in the corner to stir the hare in the pot, seein' how the fellows were enjoyin' id, but be this and be that, before I knew where I was I was fast asleep.

"I knew I was fast asleep, because I heard voices a talkin, through my sleep, though I couldn't know what they wor sayin'.

"But at last I heard some one sayin' out aloud—as plain as I'm spakin' to you now—'Mehaul-na-gow! Mehaul-na-gow! For your kindness to-night, an' for your hospitality to-night, you'll never die ov hunger or sudden or unprovided death. An' if you're ever in throuble or danger, say, 'Morragh-na-gar! Morrogh-na-gar,' an' I'll kum to your help!' An' faix, though I was still fast asleep, I knew they were goin'."

"An' did they, Mehaul? That's a mighty quare story. Did they?"

"All I know, Shaymus, an' you boys!" said Mehaul, over whose forehead the perspiration teemed with the remembrances his narration called forth. "that I was awoke in the mornin' whin the daylight was breakin' be a hand laid upon me—and a voice sayin'—

"'Mehaul, are you dead? Waken, man!'

"They kem back again—did they?"

"No, they didn't," said Mehaul; "no, they didn't, Shaymus. Don't you know very well they couldn't kum after midnight—the pour souls?"

"An' who was it, Mehaul?" asked all with breathless interest.

"'Twas Thomas Rua, Peggy's own husband here, that wid some of the neighbours kem to saarch the mountains for me, thinkin' I was lost. An' faix, well they might think id."

"An' the hare, Mehaul?"

"Faix, the hare was simmerin' in the pot on the fire, and the leather-cup was nate and clane on the rushes."

"An' was it dramin' or awake you wor—or did it happen at all?"

"I towld yez all I know, boys. Only this—yez all remember the night the bridge across the Slaney was bruck down wid the great flood, an' that I was comin' home ridin' on the 'Croppy,' the black mare I had, not knowin' anything at all of the breakage, and fell into the roarin' flood."

"Yis, yis, to be sure we do," responded the three listeners.

"Sorra wan o' me but 'ud be dhrowned that night, an' it's at the bar o' Wexford my dead body u'd be found in the mornin', if found at all, only that when I was dhrownin' I remembered the words, and cried out 'Morrogh-na-gar—God an' you help me, or I'm lost!'

"As plain as I see your faces afore me, sittin' here in this room, I saw a man's hand take hoult of the mare's bridle an' guide her to the stone causeway through the flood."

"You did, Mehaul?" whilst a shiver of terror ran through the group.

"As sure as you're livin' there, I did; and so always since I never go to sleep on a Christmas Eve without sayin' the Litany for the poor sowls that are wandherin' about, maybe. The Lord have mercy on 'em, and give them shelter in heaven."

"Amen," came again from the three listeners. And a fourth "Amen" came distinctly on the ears of the affrighted group.

"There is somebody or somethin' in the room wid us," said Ned, leaping suddenly from his chair.

"I think," said the smith, rising slowly and looking around him, "somebody—not wan ov us—spoke that time for a sartinty."

"It's in the room wid us, whatever it is," said Ned in tones of unusual alarm that made Shaymus's blood rush back from every vein in his body to his heart, and sent a shiver along his backbone as if a thin layer of ice had been applied thereto.

"Boys, don't stir," he said, whilst his teeth, nathless the heat of the glowing fire, chattered in his head, "it's something that's not right that's among us; don't stir from where yez are; keep together."

"What an ownshauch you are, Shaymus, to think anything not right could be out such a night as this," said the smith. "Faix, it was no spirit said that, anyhow. It's some wan else in the room."

"Hard fortune to me (God forgive me for cursin' this blessed an' holy night), but there's no wan in the room but oursefs," said Ned, who in his excitement rapidly searched the apartment, looking under the tables and forms and into cupboards and presses.

"Purshuin' to me if there is," assented, in low tones, the smith, who had accompanied him in his search. "It's very quare, an' very sthrange, so it is."

"I'd a swore it was i' this very room."

"So would I," assented the smith.

"Maybe 'twas something at the window," suggested Ned.

"Ned's right," said the smith, pausing. "Let's thry."

He walked over to the window. There was no one there. The streaks of condensed air streamed down still; the white snow outside reflected the light of the silver moon, which had now risen, and lay like a mantle of spotless purity on the ground; but the cold air, through a broken pane of glass streamed into the room.

The broken pane of glass had been partly shaded by the little red curtain across, and had remained unnoticed during the conversation.

"I'll tell you what, boys, I'll go out an' see if there was any one outside," said the smith.

"An' I'll go wid you," said Ned.

"Do, Mehaul; do, Ned," said Shaymus, taking much

comfort from this exhibition of nerve, and immediately concluding that where there was so much braveheartedness outside the window, there could not be much danger inside of it.

But they soon returned. The trampling around the house during the evening by passers-by had trodden the snow into the earth, and in the black and frozen surface no new tracks could be discernable.

"An' now, boys, in the name of God! we're a long time here—maybe too long, for its nigh twelve—an' it's time for us to be goin' to our own homes."

"Oh, don't, Mehaul!—don't," appealed Shaymus, "stir until the clock strikes twelve; we'll be safe afther that; they can't be out afther midnight, you know."

"What an omadhawn you are, Shaymus," said Mehaul. "Sorra hurt nor harm they'll do you, you ownshuch! An' d'ye think we can keep poor Mrs. Malone up all night? Not but sorra much she'll sleep, I'm thinkin', wid the lodger she has undher the roof wid her."

"Ay, faix," said Ned. "It's four years this very night since the poor fellow we know lost his life, by some means, in the river; an' good raison the poor thing has to remimber id."

"Ay, her fine boy gone on account iv id," said the smith. "Well, boys, I didn't intend to spake anymore about id, but as Ned has mentioned id again, all I'll say is, whoever had to do wid id, sorra ha'porth Watt had to say to it, good, bad, or indifferent. That's my belief."

"An' now I think we'd betther be stirrin'," said Ned.

"Oh, boys," said Shaymus, whose fears were dreadfully alarmed by the conversation that had passed, "can't yez wait until twelve; till midnight is over?"

But the others, whose homes were farther away, and who considered that they had waited long enough, and moreover, remembering that the journey had to be faced sooner or later, unanimously resolved to go.

It was a clear, bright night as they stood outside the door, preparing to scatter in their different ways. The moon was sailing in queenly beauty through the starry heaven, and her bright light fell in a flood of silver glory upon the white breast of the sleeping snow.

"Good night, boys."

"Good night, Mehaul. Good night, and safe home."

"Pleasant Christmas mornin' to yez all."

"Same to you."

And they separated.

The broad road lay directly to their homes for three, but with Shaymus his way lay across the fields and over stiles. Setting out, therefore, with a run, once he had parted from his companions, he crossed the stile into a meadow field, across which he ran with all his speed.

A stile of wooden steps led from this into another, and so on until he finally came to a small grove of stunted trees. It was with a heart trembling with fear that he entered this dangerous passage. Outside in the brightness of the moon and the white surface of the snow, there was comparative safety. Along its broad breast for wide spaces a small bird could be readily seen, and if there were anything supernatural around he could deflect from his path and give it a wide berth. But here!

There was no time for reflection, however, even if reflection could have aided him, which it would not. In fact, he was fleeing from the terrors his own imagination conjured up as much as anything else, and feared to let himself think. So, without stop or stay, he dashed into the grove.

The path through it was a narrow one, and only sufficient for one person to pass through. It was, therefore, necessary for him to moderate his speed. Keeping his eyes bent straight before him, he sought to avoid looking to the right or left.

A man's form standing up in a small vacant space of a sudden made the blood freeze in his body. A black visage with a winding sheet about it. A cry of terror burst from his lips, as he dashed frightened past it; but a second look of fascinated terror over his shoulder stayed his hurried course a little as it revealed the startling object in its true light. It was only the top of a furze bush lifting itself above the snow that covered it, all but two long branches that looked like arms.

Reassured a little by this, but still with a feeling of terror over him, he proceeded hurriedly onward. He was about

emerging from the grove when he was struck on the shoulders by an unknown hand. A suffocating sense of terror came over him as he bounded with the fleet agility of a deer into the open ground and into the moonlight. A quick glance around revealed the innocent cause of this terror also. There was no form behind him, as he supposed, hastening to clutch him in its dread embraces—it was only a fall of snow from the overladen branches of a tree that had descended on his shoulders.

Not waiting to shake off the mass of snow, he flew swiftly along the level field beyond.

In his excitement, and perhaps from the path being hidden by the snow, he failed to make the stile he intended, which led over the thick high hedge before him. It was necessary to skirt this for some distance until he found it. The presence of the hedge added torment to his fears. In every bush that overtopped the others he saw an apparition. Every stir of the snow, falling from bough or branch, was but the secret movement of an angry spirit to seize him; every pointed bramble from which the snow had dropped was but the extended arms of a wandering being of the night.

"This is it at last, glory be to God!" said he, as he came in front of the stile, and crossed the dyke, covered with snow, that bordered it. It was not easy to get the footing at the first step, so hidden it was with the surmounting snow.

He stooped down to search for it with his hand, and having succeeded hurriedly in placing his foot on it, he proceeded to cross.

But as he lifted his face to the top—Merciful God!

There was beyond all doubt and question the figure of a man confronting him, and climbing up the opposite side.

One appalled glance into that white face satisfied him. He knew it! Knew it at once—with the rapidity of lightning.

It was the face of a dead man—dead four long years this Christmas night.

Dead, too, not in the usual way by which people leave this world for their journey into the mysterious Hereafter; waked with no Christian prayers above him; for the rushing waters alone heard his death-cry, and the merciless Slaney carried his drowning form to the sea. All of which, even while he glanced into that face newly risen from the voiceless

deep, flashed with lightning speed—with the speed of terror and paralysing fascination—through the brain of the frightened youth.

With a cry that might have made the long-sleeping dead in the neighbouring rath stir in their mouldering graves—so pregnant was it with terror and affright—he leapt back. His foot slipped, and he fell, shutting his eyes ; he clambered to his feet, and, with a strength and fleetness that awful fear alone can lend, he flew along the hedge until he came to where it joined another ditch at right angles—all the while it seemed to him that the mocking laugh of the drowned man was running behind him ;—he leaped the latter, and wholly unknowing, and, indeed, careless of whither he went so long as he put up space enough between himself and the midnight wanderer, flew forward !

Finally, he came to a farmyard. He flew into the bawn, knocked hurriedly—once, twice, thrice, ceaseless knocks—and, the door being opened, staggered in, and in front of the kitchen fire, without power almost to open his lips, fainted dead.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TWO TRAVELLERS.

The Mail coach is starting on its long journey to Wexford from the Carman's Hall, in Dublin.

It is very early, long before daylight, and the courtyard of the hostelry is quite alive with moving people and lighted lamps, with hustling passengers and active stablemen. The four powerful horses are standing impatiently, yoked to the lumbering coach. . From the comfortable inside of the old-fashioned hotel lights gleam in all the windows ; the straw on the ground is trodden under foot in the melting snow ; whilst from the low eaves of the thatched roof the drip, drip of the half-melted snow falls with sudden thud on the wet earth beneath.

"All ready?" the coachman asks, as he looks around him from his seat.

"All ready."

"The parcels all right in the box?"

"Yes, they're all right."

"All the passengers up?"

"Yes, yes; they're all in their places."

"Then, let go, Tom, I'm off."

The coachman cracked his long whip; but just as he did a light caleche drove up to the archway of the courtyard. and, wheeling round, entered.

The horses, a pair of beautiful bays, were steaming with the speed at which they had been driven.

A young gentleman rapidly descends from the carriage as the coachman stays his whip in the act of giving the foremost horses a flick over the ears.

"I see I'm in time," said the young gentleman. "Is there room?"

"To where, sir?" asked the hostess, who had come out into the darkness to see the coach off.

"To Wexford."

"Yes, sir. There's just room for one; but one of the passengers is gettin' down at the 'Coach and Horses,' at Bray, so there will be plenty of room after that.

"Im' glad of that," said the gentleman. "Can you wait a second?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Then, I think I'll take something warm before I start."

And he disappeared inside the open door, followed by the hostess.

Calling for a measure of brandy, he proceeded to put on his heavy overcoat, which in his hurry to catch the mail he had omitted to do, and then slowly drank off at a draught the grateful liquor, the best of its kind in the house, which the pleasant looking landlady had placed before him.

Whilst he did so the observant lady had time to take note of his appearance.

He was a young fellow, not more than twenty-four or twenty-five years of age, tall and slender, but quick and active-looking. His handsome, bright face was surmounted by a travelling cap of fur, in the centre of which a gold loop

kept suspended a hood of the same material, wrapped around it, for the purpose, when let down, of shielding the traveller's neck from the wind and storm. A pair of top-boots, reaching to his thighs and nearly hidden by the overcoat, protected his lower extremities. A moustache, fair and slight, thereby contrasting somewhat with his hair, which was dark brown gave him a military appearance, from which the silver hilt of a pistol, protruding from his breast pocket, and sparkling in the light as he put on his overcoat, did not detract.

As he lifted the tumbler to his lips the diamond ring on his finger sparkled with gleams of light, giving him at once in the lady's mind the standing of one superior to the general body of travellers by the mail.

"That's good," said the traveller, with a smile of appreciation, depositing the tumbler on the counter, as he took out the purse wherefrom to pay for his seat.

"'Tis, yer honour," replied the lady, giving him at once the title his appearance demanded.

"Better give me a flask of it. The journey is a long one."

"It is that; if your honour is going the whole way."

"I'm going nearly the whole way. What will the day do? Will it rain?"

"I think not. It's more likely for snow."

"Well, I should prefer the snow and frost to the rain."

"You'll have no rain. This will keep the cowld of the snow out part of the way, anyhow."

"Many thanks. I think it will," said the traveller cheerily, "if it's like what you have just given me."

"It's just the same."

"Then, I think I'd better be starting. Good-bye."

He shook hands with the hostess with as much cordiality as if he had known her all his life.

"Good-bye, sir; and a safe journey and a pleasant Christmas."

"I hope I will have a pleasant Christmas," said he, laughingly.

"It won't be your fault if you don't, I'm thinkin'," said the landlady to herself, as she took the candle in her hand and accompanied the gentleman out to the coach.

There was only one place vacant, that on the hind seat, and thither the young gentleman quickly climbed.

As soon as he had comfortably settled himself, placed a rug under him and another around his feet, gave some directions to the driver of the caleche, and exchanged another good-humoured salutation with the landlady, the coachman cracked his whip, the horses moved outwards into the street, and in a second more the coach was in motion through the blackness of the early dawn.

Not, indeed, through the darkness altogether, for here and there oil lamps threw a feeble glare on the surface of the snow-covered streets at odd, very odd, intervals indeed, seeming like white patches through the darkness around, and serving about the same use in lighting the streets that a lightship does in lighting the black waste of sea at night; but even these got scantier as they left the principal streets; until they disappeared altogether in the suburbs.

The novelty of the scene for a time attracted the traveller's attention—the qnaint look of the glimmering light as it shone for a limited space against the brick walls or against the closely curtained windows, snugly esconsing some dreaming sleeper, appeared new and strange to him; but when they had passed all these, and nought but the darkness around, and the darker sky overhead, from which the stars—if they had shone at all during the night—had faded, presented itself to his eyes, he turned his attention to his travelling companion.

His travelling companion was, like himself, closely muffled up. What he looked like, even if he had not been muffled up, he could scarcely say, for the light was too indistinct to perceive his face, near as he sat to him.

But the spirits of the first traveller were too bright and buoyant to remain silent whilst there was anything in the shape of a human being to talk to.

The usual opening presented itself.

"Have a cigar?"

"Thank you, not at present."

"Don't smoke?"

"Not cigars—merely a pipe."

"Tobacco too heavy for me. Cigars too light for you, I suppose?"

"Well, no; I have smoked them for years. I come from

a land where they are nearly exclusively smoked. Not cigars, but something even lighter."

"Cigarettes?"

"Yes."

"You come from France?"

"From some place abroad, at any rate," said the muffled-up traveller. Then, as if anxious to change the conversation, he said:—

"I should have commenced to smoke long ago, but I feared that you did not like it."

"That objection being removed, I suppose we may light?"

"Yes, with all my heart."

The ice thus broken, both travellers lighted, the one his pipe, the other his cigar; in the interval of which the conversation continued.

"Been long abroad?" asked Traveller No. 1, the last arrival.

"Yes, some years."

"Like travelling!"

"Well, yes, I do. I have travelled a good deal."

"Been in Paris?"

"There are very few of the European capitals I have not been in."

"Now, I call that pleasant," said the person whom we have called Traveller No. 1, gaily. "I have often longed to visit those cities, but with the exception of a short visit once to Paris, I have never been out of these islands."

"You are not an Irishman, I presume?"

"No; I am an Englishman. I come from the pleasant plains of Kent. You are an Englishman, too, I take it."

"Well, no, I am not; I am an Irishman."

"I should have taken you, from your accent, to be an Englishman."

"That must have come from my living so long abroad. By the way, is that snow?"

Some fleecy leaflets had fallen into the bowl of his pipe softly, sputtering and hissing therein.

"Yes; I think we are in for a rather severe day," said the traveller, taking his cigar from his mouth to see if it were still alight.

"I fancy so. What a dismal look that dawn breaking yonder has! Do you travel the whole way?"

"Not quite. I am going to a place some few miles off Wexford, to spend the Christmas. Do you know that country?"

"Yes; I ought to. I was born there?"

"Did you ever hear of Kilbremmer?"

"Thousands of times. Colonel Victor's place."

"So it is. I am going there. Did you know him?"

"I have heard of him," said the unknown traveller cautiously.

"It is a fine place, I believe?"

"It is; at least, so I have heard. Have you never been there?"

"No, never. I have been asked down there for the Christmas."

"Old friends?"

"Well, no, indeed, quite the contrary—new friends. Met them at a ball in Dublin Castle, and very frequently afterwards. They seem to be very agreeable people."

"Do you intend to remain long?"

"Well, it all depends. I am not tied to time just at present. Plenty of shooting?"

"Yes, I should think so; it is a fine neighbourhood for game."

"I am glad to hear that. But there are other attractions. There are some very handsome girls there."

"Ah!"

"Yes; one of them particularly is the handsomest that has been seen in Dublin society for many years."

"That must be Clare, the eldest," said the unknown traveller, half unconsciously.

"You know them, then?" asked the other quickly.

"Well, yes. I——" said the unknown, regretting his want of caution, and pausing to see how best to evade further questioning on the subject. "I did happen to have occasion to hear their names mentioned some years ago. But it *is* some years ago, and they must have grown to womanhood since."

"By Jove, you might swear that. Lovely types of womanhood, too. Real Irish graces—princesses, by Jove, you might call them."

"I half envy you your Christmas," said the traveller, with

something of a sigh. "But see, the dawn is breaking; has broken, in fact, unnoticed, for it is quite light."

"Yes, and we appear to be approaching a toll-house."

"So we are. This is Bray. Let us get down and walk; my limbs are stiff with the cold. Ten minutes' walk to the 'Coach and Horses' will do us no harm."

"I agree. Take a drop of this first. It will do you no harm. Our late landlady told me it was her best."

"I have been too long among rough and ready companions to refuse such an offer," said Traveller No. 2 gaily, as he placed the flask to his lips.

"I see you don't travel unprotected," remarked the latter again, as, descending from his perch after the other, he noticed the silver-mounted pistol which had fallen from the breast-pocket of his companion to the ground.

"No; though indeed, it was merely by accident more than intention I carried this," said the first traveller, picking it up from the snow in which it had embedded itself. "It was a present."

"And a very handsome one it is," said the other, glancing at it in his hands.

"Yes, it is," said the first, handing it to him for inspection, "very richly mounted."

"Very," said the other, admiringly. "This is no Tower pattern. This is one of Reaumor's make. I'd know the long barrel anywhere, even if his mark was not on it. A good shot, I warrant you?"

"I have never tried it."

"Suppose I try it now?"

"As you please."

"Very well. I'll try it on that blackbird asleep on yonder bough."

"With little chance, save of frightening him."

"I doubt that," said the other confidently; "still there is no use in taking life needlessly. Even that of a bird."

"You are unnecessarily tender-hearted, I think," laughed the first traveller, meaning that the bird would have been in no danger, but his companion took it in another light.

"I value life too highly to take even that of a bird without sufficient reason," said traveller No. 2, seriously. "It is destroying what no human power can give again."

"You have never been a soldier, I should think," still chaffed the other.

"You might readily be mistaken there too," said his fellow-traveller, significantly. "But that is beside the question. Toss up a snowball. It will suit all purposes sufficiently well."

The traveller, falling in with the humour of the notion, took up some of the snow in his hands, rolled it sufficiently hard, and when it was hardened to the purpose, flung it high in the air.

His companion watched its ascent, and when it had reached its furthest height and was on the point of descent, he raised the pistol at arm's length, glanced rapidly along the barrel, pulled the trigger, and a dozen pieces of descending snow proved the accuracy of his aim.

"By Jove, that was splendidly done," said the owner, as he watched the effect of the shot. "It was no faltering hand did that. I should not care to stand before you at twenty paces."

"I might not be so accurate in my aim if you were," said the other, laughingly. "It is a good weapon and a sure one," handing it to him.

"Certainly not; it would be a pity to part you both," gaily returned the owner, pushing it back, as the other presented it. "Keep it; accept it as a present."

"Nay; it is too valuable a gift to a chance acquaintance. I know its value," said No 2, persisting in returning it.

"If it were tenfold as valuable, you shall keep it," said the other. "I have seldom need of it. It is only valuable to me because there is a curious story in connection with it. It was given me by Colonel Victor."

"That makes me the more anxious to return it. There may be a tender story attaching to it."

"So there is; but nevertheless you must keep it. I declare I shall not take it back," he said, retreating a few steps as the other, holding it out in his hand, still essayed to return it.

"Well, I shall do so," said the latter, as he saw that further insistance would be useless, "on one condition."

"What is that?"

"That you will accept this from me"

He drew from the inside pocket of his coat a pistol. Its long thin barrel—much longer than that which he had transferred to his left hand—glistened like polished silver. Its stock was burnished with gold, and the settings around the lock were crusted with precious stones.

"There is a story connected with that, too," he said laughingly, "though not of a tender nature."

Traveller No. 1 took it in his hand, more from curiosity than with any intention of accepting it.

"This is a beautiful weapon, indeed: why, it is a perfect gem," said he admiringly, as he surveyed it. "These are precious stones—no ordinary ones, either."

"They are. The hand that offered that would not offer else," said No. 2. "Do you see any initials carved on it?"

"Yes; I see," said No 1, inspecting it more closely.

"I see the initial 'N.'"

"Yes; just so. That pistol was given me on a singular occasion by a very singular personage."

"By?——" said his companion inquiringly.

"By General Buonaparte."

"What!" said the other with surprise.

"By no less a personage," said his acquaintance carelessly.

"And do you expect that I would take this costly and magnificent weapon for my worthless one? Nonsense! I wouldn't dream of such a thing. It would be" (said the traveller, casting about for an illustration) "highway robbery."

"Robbery or no robbery," said his friend with an air of careless pleasantness, "the exchange is made now, and it cannot be undone. Besides, I have taken quite a regard for your pistol."

"I shall certainly not accept this magnificent article," persisted the young gentleman. "Why it is absolutely priceless."

"I fancy in time of peril," added his acquaintance laughingly, "yours would be more so. But we have got close to the 'Coach and Horses.' Breakfast is the debatable article now."

"Well, be it so for the present," said his companion, mentally resolving, as he pocketed the pistol, not to trespass so far on the generosity of his newmade acquaintance, but to return it during their after journey.

"Well, I declare this is comfortable—it is enough to compensate one for the cold of the early morning journey," said Traveller No. 2, as he stood before the roaring fire that, in anticipation of the arrival of the mail, glowed in the open fire-place and roared up the ample chimney.

"I vote we take a nip of something before breakfast. I have not got the cold out of my bones yet," said his companion.

"I have no objection; though I have certainly no need for anything to stimulate my appetite. I would eat a piece of wild wolf."

"Rather tough eating, for which we have no necessity here, thank heaven, said Traveller No. 1, as the grateful aroma of frying ham came to his senses.

"Time was, when there *was* such necessity, at least with me," said his companion, dallying with his glass, and eyeing its colour, as he held it between him and the glowing fire.

"Where was ——?"

But the entrance of the waitress to intimate that breakfast was ready interrupted the question that the traveller was about to put; and, hastily tossing off their tumblers, they withdrew to the cosy parlour, where a hot breakfast, very agreeable and acceptable, was awaiting them.

They were both too hungry for conversation, even if the rather mixed company—the cargo of the Wexford Mail—breakfasting also, did not prevent a chat of a semi-private or particular character.

Abundance of conversation there was, however—the prospect of the day, the price of flannels and wools, then a fabric of staple manufacture in country districts, anecdotes, etc., of the various Dublin merchants the parties had been trading with in the metropolis, furnished their fellow-travellers with abundance of material for conversation, to which the two gentlemen lent but an indifferent ear.

Finally the bell rang; the travellers all stood up, the reckoning was paid, and with more or less of regret for the comfort they were leaving and the discomfort they were facing, the travellers resumed their places.

"More snow, ladies and gentlemen," said the driver, as he climbed into his seat. "That's a heavy cloud of snow

over the say. 'Faix, it'll be hard travellin' the Wicklow roads to-day, I'm thinkin'."

"It'll bè a white Christmas wid us before we reach Clohogue," said a stout man, dressed in warm grey frieze overcoat, thick as a half inch board, and evidently of home manufacture.

"Throth will it, yer reverence. If it's the blessin' o' God, we'll get there Christmas Eve," remarked the coachman.

The mention of the word Clohogue arrested the attention of the second of the travellers, and, turning the collar of his heavy overcoat over his ears, and over the rich cashmere comforter that ensconced his neck, he turned a glance of hidden inquiry in the direction of the speaker; but either he failed to recognise him or he had the faculty of controlling his features, for he withdrew his gaze again with no particular expression resting thereon.

Yet it was clear that something had arrested his attention or kindled thought within him, for, having kindled his pipè, he retreated within his overcoat, and, paying no attention to his companion or to his fellow-travellers, sat, moodily thinking.

His companion seeing this, with considerate politeness left him to his thoughts, and having lit a cigar proceeded cheerfully to take note of the country through which they passed; of the high white-capped hills to the right, and the dark angry surface of the cloud-laden sea to the left; then of his motley fellow-travellers; and finally fell into deep musing himself as he speculated on the reception at Kilbremmer, and the beautiful face that graced it; for the bright eyes that beamed therein were enough of themselves to make the veriest winter day bright with sunshine, and turn the cloud-laden sky into one of southern brightness and glory.

"The Pass of Coolrae, ladies and gentlemen!" said the coachman again. "We stop here for half an hour for dinner."

"Dinner! Could it be possible the day had advanced so far? Could it?"

Yes, it could and had. Twenty miles of snowy road had been bowled over by the horses ere the traveller had ceased to occupy himself in thinking of Clare Victor's handsome face.

And the other—what was he thinking of?

CHAPTER V.

THE OVERTURNED MAIL.

The snow falling fast and the air darkening with clouds induced but a hurried stay at the hostelry—merely time enough to snatch a hurried meal. The roads would not be getting better or easier to travel in face of the growing storm.

Once in the seat again, and with fresh horses under him the coachman plied the whip, and mile after mile of the road passed in quick succession. Past the white ridges of the Wicklow mountains, past Jowse and Lugnaquilla, until they crossed the boundary line that separated Wicklow from its sister county, Wexford.

The white leafy particles had been falling at intervals, and the coach and its occupants were white with snow. The steaming team alone showed black against the white surroundings.

The coach-road in the times of which we speak had but little parallelism with the magnificent roads that now intersect the country. In these somewhat remote days the roads ran in a straight line, up and down, taking no note of hills or levels, but bravely facing forward. Where a circuit of a mile would obviate a precipice, the road engineers boldly eschewed the former, and faced the latter.

The old coach-road has long given way to better and more suitable ones, and the spade and plough have long since turned it once more into fallow fields. But the road with which we are most intimately connected, led, just as the night had begun to darken, over the side of a hill half hidden by the fallen snow.

Most of the passengers had descended at one place or another on their way, but the two passengers of whom we have cognisance, and the traveller who made reference to Clohogue, remained.

The two former, at the last stage, had taken up the places on the vacant box-seat on either side of the coachman; and one of them saw with impatience the lowering dusky clouds, and remembered the distance yet to be travelled.

"Why, confound it," he said, fixing another cigar. "It's too bad. I had no idea the road was so long."

"Nor so bad," added the second traveller; "this seems to be a very dangerous road we've entered on. Don't you think so, coachman?"

Coachman thinks not. He has driven over it every third day for nearly half a century, and sees nothing dangerous about it. Says so, too, at intervals during the whiff of his pipe.

Traveller No. 1, on the contrary, opines that it is exceedingly risky.

"Why, it is only a track alongside the hill. It is scarcely discernible in the snow. There is not even a wall to mark its lowermost boundary. One might readily tumble down that hill. Yes, down to that narrow, black track through the whiteness at foot that marks the path of a brawling torrent."

At all of which the coachman, in high humour, occasionally burst into loud guffaws.

Little satisfied, however, with the form of answer to his remarks, Traveller No 1 says—

"Is this portion of the road long? For, on my word and honour, I am not at all satisfied to travel it in this manner. Is it long?"

"D'ye see that brow yonder?"

"Yes, and a rather ugly one it looks."

"A few perches beyond that."

"Where do we get into then?"

"A straight wide road," says the coachman. "Down the hill. Wide and broad."

"Well, I suppose there is no use getting down for that distance," said traveller No. 1, applying a light to his cigar, and glancing back uneasily at the car track, that skirted with dangerous proximity the declivity of the hill.

"No; av coorse not. But——"

"But what?"

The traveller paused in his cigar-lighting, and looked up—looked up all the quicker at an exclamation of alarm from his companion.

"What is it? Oh, heavens!"

A glance revealed to him his danger. A bulldog of the

mastiff breed had suddenly burst from the low furze that covered the hill-side, and leaped with savage ferocity at the head of the nearest horse, in which action it was immediately joined by a companion.

The horses, startled by the suddenness of the attack, had leaped to one side—to the declivitous side, and had slipped downwards—had plunged downwards, dragging the other horses with them. And almost instantaneously after them slipped the coach. The movements were so sudden, and followed one another with such rapid sequence, gliding into one another, as it were, from the first slight cause to the following effect, that there was scarcely time to think, much less for action.

"Hold the reins, they're down! Hold the reins.

"Merciful Providence of God!" exclaimed the stout man, as with a dexterousness not to be expected from him he leaped from his side on to the level of the road.

With a sudden bound, and with an exclamation of horror, Traveller No. 2 followed his example, alighting squarely on his feet, and rushing at once to the horses' heads.

But it was too late!

The foremost that had slipped down the hill plunged more and more, dragging their fellows after them in one plunging, slipping, tumbling mass. There was no hope nor stay for them; the decline was too steep and too slippery with the snow.

"Cut the traces! Cut the traces!" shouted the stout man; but before Traveller No. 2 had time to draw his pocket knife for the purpose, he saw, to his infinite horror, the coach slip, sway unsteadily, and then topple over, carrying with it in its fall the coachman and the younger traveller.

For a second there flashed before his eyes the upturned wheels, the struggling horses, some with their feet in the air, and some plunging on their sides. Then came the sound of smashing glass and the cry of human voices.

Dashing down the hill with the speed of lightning, the stout man reached the confused mass, and with two or three quick gashes of his long knife, severed the traces.

Separated from the plunging horses, and with the active assistance of his companion, the coach, by hanging on to its wheels when it rolled again, was stayed in its descent.

The loosed horses struggled to their feet; but the coachman and his companion were under.

"Give me a hand to lift them from under this. They are badly injured, I am afraid."

The coach was in fact lying over them.

"I am afraid they are killed," said Traveller No. 2, in great distress and perplexity. "This weight falling on them must crush the life out of them."

"We cannot lift this. What shall we do?" asked the stout countryman.

"Roll it off them down the hill."

"The edge is lying on his breast. We shall kill him if we do."

"It is crushing the life out of him as it is."

"Is there no assistance?"

Traveller No. 2 looked around him. The darkness had swiftly descended even whilst the accident was taking place, and he could not see the faces of his fellow-travellers. Only the stertorous breathing of one showed that they had not both, at least, been crushed to death.

He stood to his feet in excitement, and shouted, "Help, help!"

To his infinite relief voices quickly responded from the hill above, and in a second or two three or four men, running swiftly, were beside him.

"This is an awful business," said one. "How did it happen?"

"There are two men lying under the coach," was all Traveller No. 2 could reply.

"Two men! Good God! Come boys, lift it at once."

The men, who had been hunting hares on the hill, saw at a glance what was necessary, and in a second eight stout hands were under the frame of the vehicle, and, with one united and powerful effort lifted it some feet downwards and clear of the crushed occupants.

"Lift him gently, poor fellow," said the countryman, who seemed now to take the lead, as they took the snow off the face and lifted the insensible form of the young traveller.

"Is he dead?" asked Traveller No. 2, with intense anxiety, as he saw the stout traveller feel his pulse, and suddenly

tearing open his breast, thrust his hand into the region of his heart.

"Not dead," said he, slowly, "but he seems badly crushed."

"Thank God, it is not worse."

"Nor are there any of his limbs broken except his arm," pursued the stout man after a short investigation.

"Thank God for that, too," said the second traveller.

"Was he a friend of yours?" asked the other, turning to him.

"Only a friend of this day; but it would be shocking to see his life lost so simply and so suddenly."

"So it would," assented the other; "but it is not yet at any rate. Let me see how the coachman is, poor fellow."

"He is not so badly hurt," said he—"not so badly bruised, I mean—but his leg is broke."

"What shall be done?" asked the Traveller No 2 in great anxiety.

"Not much, unless these good neighbours will help us. Could you get us a door, or anything of that kind, good friends?"

"To be sure, Father John. We'll have a couple here in a hand's turn"; and two of them at once proceeded on their errand.

"Father John," thought Traveller No. 2. "Good heavens, it cannot be—and yet I thought I knew his face. But he was so muffled up. Surely it is he! Only to think of my travelling all day with him and not knowing it."

"Here, my friend, sit down and take this poor fellow's head on your knee. Gently—gently; he will not bear much rough work at present. He has had enough of it already."

This direction broke the current of his surprised thoughts.

"There ought to be something in the interior of the coach, if it is not broken, as I suppose it is," said Father John, "that would give him some strength."

"I think I have some in my flask," said the traveller, interpreting his words.

"Thanks; you are a friend in need," said the priest, as he opened the flask and poured, as well as he could, a few drops between the lips of the insensible youth.

"That will do him no harm," said he, turning his attention to the coachman, to whom he administered some more.

By the time the stimulant had been administered, the hunters, who had departed, returned with a barn door, on which, with considerable difficulty, the injured men were placed, and lifted up to the level of the road.

Once there, and by placing under the door two strong poles taken from the coach, four men, two on either side—bore their forms along to a place of refuge, the priest and Traveller No. 2 walking after the sad procession.

"That has been a sorrowful accident," remarked the younger traveller.

"Yes, poor fellow. It's a sad Christmas Eve for them."

"I trust they are not seriously injured."

"I am inclined to think not—that is, not fatally," said the priest, "the soft, yielding snow has helped to save them from being utterly crushed."

"I am glad, heartily glad, you think so."

"You are very goodnatured to feel so interested in them," remarked the priest, glancing sideways at the speaker through the darkness. "You have not seen as much human suffering possibly as I have."

"I have seen enough, at any rate," said the traveller. "More than I once thought I should ever see. But not like this."

"Not like this."

"No; the scenes of human suffering I have seen were on the battle-field. This is not. Besides, it is Christmas Eve."

"True; that lends an additional sadness to it."

By this time they had reached the farmhouse by the roadside, just where the mountain road began to descend to the plain, and the door and its load of twin sufferers were borne inside.

Father John, when the wounded men were borne into the parlour, investigated their cases very carefully, pronounced both to be more stunned than injured, with the exception of the broken limbs.

His knowledge in simple surgery stood him in good stead on this occasion; and with a skill that might do credit to a Fellow of the College of Surgeons, he spliced up, with such

rough materials as he could fashion, the wounded limb, bandaged it carefully, and, having administered some strengthening drinks to both, prepared to take his leave.

"I cannot remain longer, my dear," he added at last to the pressing entreaties of the woman of the house to stay for the night. "To-morrow will be Christmas morning. I must be in Boolavogue to say eight o'clock Mass. Glory be to the holy name of God, Who spared me to do so!"

"Ned will drive your reverence home," said she kindly.

"That was the very favour I was about to ask from you. But it is a long drive—of fourteen long miles."

"Sorra may care, your reverence, if it were forty four; sure it's proud and happy we are to be able to do you a service."

"That your good heart may never want a horse to drive or a son to drive it. An old priest's blessing can do no harm." And as all knelt for his blessing the priest extended his hands over the kneeling group, not forgetting to do likewise to the two insensible forms.

His quick eye noticed the absence of one from the gathering.

"Where is my fellow-traveller?" he asked.

Nobody had seen him. He had not entered with the others. The four bearers had not seen him disappear; and the clergyman himself had been too busily occupied to notice previously his absence.

"I wonder he should go away. It is most unfeeling," he said indignantly. Then with a sigh to himself, "A bad heart. I am afraid it was only too true. I never believed it until this minute. I believed all my old compassion for him was misplaced."

CHAPTER VI.

WATT OV THE CROSSES.

THE good priest had, however, not long departed on his cold journey when Traveller No. 2 entered. He had returned to the overturned coach to see that the horses were placed in a safe condition. He took his place at the bedside of

his unconscious companion, and waited patiently, until the period of insensibility over, he should again be able to speak.

"You here?"

The words fell on his ear with pleasing effect. Traveller No. 2 had been busy recollecting old memories, some of a pleasing character and some of a painful nature; and the words of his recovering companion came auspiciously to banish the latter.

"Yes, I am here. Are you much hurt—how do you find yourself?"

"I feel heavy and weighed down, somehow."

"Do you remember what happened?"

"I remember the coach slipping—nothing further. What happened afterwards?"

Traveller No. 2 explained to him as gently as possible the nature of the injuries he had sustained.

"Well, thank heaven it is no worse."

"It might readily have been."

"You are delaying on the journey?"

"Only slightly. I could not possibly leave, however, till I saw how you fared."

"Thanks. You are very kind."

"Don't mention it. But now that you are recovered from your swoon, I fear I shall be obliged to leave. I must get to my destination somehow."

"I am sorry you have inconvenien——"

"Don't mind that. Only that I have very pressing reasons for leaving I should not heed trespassing on the hospitality of our friends here for a few days to see you still further mended."

"I could not dream of trespassing on you so much, even if you had time."

"Unfortunately it is impossible at present. An old wish—an old superstition, if you will—but dreamt over many a long night when the ground was my bed and the starry night my canopy, makes it imperative on me to leave."

"But your pistol——"

"I see the accident has not impaired your memory, and I am glad of it," said Traveller No. 2, cheerfully.

"No; I feel gradually growing stronger. Only for this

confounded accident to my arm, I should be all right. You will find it in the——"

"I am afraid you will be compelled to accept it. If nothing else it will be a souvenir of this rather remarkable journey."

"Well, be it so," said the injured traveller. "We shall meet again, I trust."

"Well, that is rather improbable; but even if not we shall have something to remind us of one another. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," and with a cordial leave-taking they separated. Separated, curiously enough, with as little knowledge of one another as they had when first leaving the stage-yard in Dublin in the morning.

The difficulty of providing a vehicle once over— a difficulty which would have become an impossibility but for the stage horses now rendered idle by the breakdown of the coach— the second traveller took his departure.

Closely muffled up, as he had been all the day, he ascended the seat of the jaunting car, and once more emerged into the night. The road was long and cheerless; but the hours pass and the miles pass under any conditions, and at last he found himself nearing Clohogue. Whereupon, dismissing the car, he proceeded to walk the remainder of the journey.

The moon had by this time risen, and, after walking briskly forward for some time—perhaps to warm himself, perhaps because agitated thoughts passed through his mind and his steps moved in accordance with them—he stopped suddenly.

"Ay. There's the house! Not a single thing altered! There's the boreen leading up to it," he soliloquised. "I wonder shall I go that way. I wonder how is she? Does she ever think of me?"

He took a few steps in that direction, but again hesitated.

"No. Dearly as I should like to see her sweet face and often as I have thought of her—it would shock her too much to go there at once. No. I shall go the other way. Yes, the other way. The stile ought to be somewhere hereabouts. So it is—unchanged like all around. After all, four years is but a short time; but ah! how long to me."

He crossed over the stile, entered the field, and unhindered

by the snow that covered it, had no difficulty in making his straight pathway to the next stile, and so on, until he came to the orchard that lay at the back of the house—at the back of the wayside hostelry described in our first chapter.

"There's the very latch I fastened on the day I left," said he, with a smile on his face, as he opened the gate. "It's little notion I had how long it would be until I opened it again, or what strange scenes my eyes should rest on before I next saw it. Well, the world is vey strange, and men's destinies are very strange. Yes, men's destinies *are* very strange. Hallo!"

The light in the room, whose window looked out on the orchard, attracted his attention.

"They are up late, or rather early," he thought. "Can it be that mother is here, or my sister! What a surprise they will get."

He walked over softly through the snow, and looked in; or rather endeavoured to look in, for the glass outside was covered with a thin sheet of ice, which, together with the brightness of the moon, made it difficult for him to see inside.

Slightly, and not to attract more attention than need be, he breathed on the glass and rubbed the moisture away with his pocket-handkerchief. Then, applying his eyes to the clear surface, he looked in.

A large fire was burning cheerfully on the hearth. Two gentlemen sat at it, talking together. Slight as was the noise he made it was sufficient to make one of them look round; and as the traveller's eyes, in the light of the candle that stood on the table beside them, fell on his face, the latter drew back with a sudden exclamation of surprise.

"My God! What brought *him* here?"

But the thought had scarcely time to pass through his mind or he himself time to withdraw his face from the window, when a cry, partly of surprise, and partly of terror, burst from the gentleman inside, which showed Traveller No. 2 that he had been seen and recognised!

"This is awfully unfortunate! Frightful!" thought he. "Who could have suspected it? The villian has seen me! Good heavens!"

Without taking further thought of what he should do, he

hastily retraced his steps; hurried back through the gate again; recrossed the fields he had passed; and in much shorter time than it had taken him to come, found himself once more at the entrance to the boreen whereat he had paused on his way.

"First impressions are best," he thought to himself. "I should have taken their promptings and gone there first. I had better do so now."

Indeed, without being in any way influenced by this reasoning, his feet had already taken that direction, and he found himself in the boreen whilst yet arriving at this conclusion.

The boreen was a long one. It led, as is customary, on many farmers' houses far removed from the high road; and, unlike the latter, marked its way with many curious twists and windings.

"I did not think this lane was so long. It used not, I think, be so long in the old times. It is a curious hour, and —and a curious visit. What on earth brought that accursed villian to that house? He of all people in the world. What an odd look these old trees have in the snow. Hallo! what the devil are you about?"

He had just turned a narrow corner of the laneway, over which some tall alder trees threw an unpleasant and weird shadow, when a figure, whose footsteps he could not hear on the deadening snow, flung himself against him with great force, staggering him back some distance, and giving rise to the last exclamation and query.

The party so addressed had been running with his head down at the greatest possible speed, and the sudden shock, together with the yielding surface of the snow, caused the runner to prostrate himself with great force on the ground.

"I say; what the devil are you about? Is there anyone after you? Who are you, confound you?"

The individual recovering himself from his sudden fall and affright, raised himself with much difficulty on his knees.

As he did so, so the light of the moon fell with great distinctness on his questioner's face, revealing every feature thereof with clearness greater than that of the day.

A sudden howl burst from the runner's lips as his eyes fell thereon.

"Oh, mother of God! oh, holy Moses, an' all the saints!

oh, the blessed angels presarve me, am I to be always seein' em? Oh, be the powdhers of war! in the name ov God an' all the saints, I command you, whoever y'ar, or whatever y'ar, to be gone."

He had fallen flat on his face again on the snow, as if to give shelter to his eyes, hence half of his affrighted invocations were lost to his hearer. But from the trembling of his limbs the latter could see that for some reason or another he was in great terror.

"Will you get up out of that, you grovelling idiot, and say what's amiss with you?"

"Oh, whatever kem over me this night, of all nights in the year? Oh, holy St. David! Our Father——oh, God, forgive me! I cannot remember a word av it now! Oh, Mehaul, God forgive you!—oh! oh!—I believe in——The Lord forgive me all my sins—I'm a dead man this night!"

"Will you stand up you lunatic! Who are you? What are you doing out this night? Will you"—the wrathful traveller interrupted his words—or rather supplemented them—by a pretty smart application of his boot-top to the ribs of the trembling postulant. "Who are you? What brings you here?"

"Oh, don't. Let me off this time, an' as sure as yer sowl is in glory, I'll pray for you. I'll say a pather an' ave—a pather an' ave, I will, twenty av 'em—for you, mornin' noon, an' night—aitin' and drinkin', sleepin' and wakin', that you may get shelter somewhere, above or below—an' be hot and warm—an' that you may never have to be ramblin' about in the cowld an' snow an' the hardships any more av a Christmas night."

This imploring appeal—but a small portion of which, however, reached the traveller's ears by reason of the speaker's face being partly embedded in the snowy ground—instead of allaying the ire of the party to whom it was addressed, rather increased it.

"What the plague are you muttering, you darned fool? Are you drunk? Stand up like a human being, and say why you are rushing about like a spirit."

"I'm not, yer honour! I'm not one of yerselfs at all! Sorra bit o' me! It's sorry enough I'd be to pretind anything of the kind! Don't do anything to me, an' as sure as

my name is Shaymus Morrissey, that I may never ait a bit of the world's vittals, but I'll say prayers for yerself, an' every other poor sowl that's ramblin about for yer sins."

"Well, this is a nice how-dye-do," said the traveller, irrascibly, glancing at the prostrate form, who still continued to mutter away, in his terror, joint appeals, and prayers, and supplications.

"If it wor for the night-walkin', or the poachin,' or the murther, yer apunishin——"

"May the devil fly away with you, you eternal booby!" cried the traveller, now irritated beyond measure; and, seizing him by the collar of his coat, he lifted him fairly on his knees in the snow. "Look at me!"

"Oh the sorra look, yer honour. Wan is enough to see, and in wan night! Oh, glory be to God, that I should hav the luck to——"

Whatever more he said was hidden in his two hands, which were closely pressed over his face and mouth.

"Well, I've met many a strange character in my time; but of all the confounded fools!—stand up, you omadhawn! Take your hand from your eyes and look at me. Do you know me?"

"Is it know you—God forgive you your sins!—why wouldn't I? An' I'll pray for you every——"

"Who am I?"

"You're the ghost av the—you're the poor sowl that—that kilt Dick-na-Raheen by the Slaney four years ago, this Christmas night. May the Lord forgive you your sins, and bring your sowl somewhere that it won't be cowld an' hungry—or cowld anyway."

"I am what?" asked the traveller, utterly astonished at what he heard, and quite unheeding the remainder of the incoherent ejaculations, "I am what?"

"Oh, for the honour of God don't ax me ag'in. Shure you know all about yourself more nor I do. God forgive you for id, an' all your other sins, I pray."

The traveller stood still in grave and serious alarm.

A new light broke on him at once, carrying with it a feeling of terror hardly less than that which possessed the figure kneeling, with closed eyes and uplifted hands, before him. For though the latter was semi-lunatic from supernatural

terrors, the traveller became suddenly possessed with affright for reasons far more dangerous, though reasonable and earthly. So that for some moments the singular pair retained their curious position without speaking, save the semi-audible and incoherent prayers and utterances of the kneeler.

"Well, stand up, and answer me a few questions," said the traveller, all at once recognising the situation. "I never hurt those that are bold enough to speak o me. I'll let you go safe and sound, and, what's more, I'll keep every other spirit from touching you this night. Don't take your hands from your eyes now, and answer me."

"Yes, yer honour's ghost. May the saints above——"

"That'll do. Answer me now. What did I do?"

"Oh, for God's sake, don't ax me that again?"

"Yes, I will. Answer me, if you want to go to your home ever more."

"Faix, nothin' at all; only a bit ov a killin' ov Dick-na-Raheen—an' shure it's many a wan done the likes afore an' is in heaven now, safe an' sound. Long life to them."

"Who saw me do it?

"'Torney Gordon——"

"He said so?"

"Och, shure he did; the whole world knew ov id."

"And where is Dick——?"

"Oh, begorra! how do I know? Faix the crathur is like yerself. He's out of his grave, or whatever he's in, like yerself, ramblin' about this blessed and holy night. God forgive him!"

"He's dead, then?"

"Faix, nobody knows that betther nor yer honor's ghost's own self—an' faix I wondher yer honour didn't meet t'other ghost in yer ramblins', for he is out to-night, too."

"Out!"

"Yes, the divil a doubt av id! God forgive me for cursin. an' in such company, too. I met him meself—afore I fainted!"

"See here," said the traveller, confused by these disjointed statements. "Do you tell me Dick is dead?"

"Sorra wan ov him but is. Who knows that betther nor——"

"How was it known that he is dead?"

"Arrah, shure he never turned up afther. Didn't 'Torney Gordon see it all. Didn't I see him meself to-night?"

"You met him to-night?"

"Faix, an' more nor me met him."

"Who else?"

"Be the powdhers o' war! There I am again cursin'! (Maybe it's the best thing I could do," thought he, of a sudden, "just to show him I'm as bad in a manner as himself). 'Torney Gordon saw him at the forge ov Clohogue this very night."

"Saw him at the forge of Clohogue!"

"Divil a less!"

The noise of a car approaching along the boreen, fell on the traveller's ear. Hardly anticipating who it was, but desirous of cutting short this interview, he said—

"Well, Shaymus; you have told the whole thing truly; and you will not be met again this night by any ghost because you have. You may go now. Take the short cut across the fields; run as hard as you can; don't lift your head, and don't look back. *De Profundis clamavi ad te.*"

The permission to go once vouchsafed, Shaymus, without looking once at his tormentor, leaped to his feet, and, turning round, ran to where there was a stile, leaped with prodigious agility across it, and with the speed of a frightened hare ran across the field. The whole thing was so grotesque and absurd that, as the traveller watched him swiftly running with head down, he burst into a heavy fit of laughter.

"I wonder what would Lannes or Hoche say if they thought I was taken for a ghost. It's well there is nobody looking or the nick-name might stick to me. That was a capital idea to throw in the Latin. He'll never come this way again after nightfall. Though it was not an original idea, after all. I think I heard it somewhere before. Ha, ha, ha."

Indulging in a pleasant fit of laughter, he moved some distance up the lane to where the thick brambles and bushes were throwing a shadow of impenetrable darkness into the ditch, and esconsed himself there until the approaching car should pass.

Two men were talking in a low voice as the horse trotted

rapidly past. The wheels made but little noise on the silent snow, so that, whispered as their words were, they came with distinctness enough on his listening ears. He stood within a few feet of them as they passed.

"You could not be mistaken in him?" said one.

"No, not the slightest. Living or dead, he was there!" said the other, whose voice he knew.

"He would not dream of coming back to the country, if he were living, with the gallows waiting for him."

"He would do anything. He was always ready to risk his neck at anything."

"He showed that by the murder of——"

"For heaven's sake, don't mention that!" said the other speaker, with a sudden spasm of trembling that surprised his companion. "There is no use talking of such things at night. I wish to heaven it were daylight. I'll never leave the house at night again. What time do you think it is?"

"It cannot be much more than two o'clock, if even so much. Do you think we will find the family up?"

"I don't know, but we can make them get up. We will be safe there. It is awkward calling after the day was fixed, but it cannot be helped. I wish we were there!"

"I say, hadn't he something to say there, before that happened?"

There was no answer to this question, or if there were, they had passed away too far for the listener to hear it. When they had turned the corner shutting them out of sight the traveller came from his hiding place into the centre of the road.

"Yes, there is where he is going," he muttered to himself. "The eternal villain is still prosecuting his visits there. What's that they said about the murder? Then there was some one killed that night. Good God! and my name down for it, all the time. That bears out what that idiot stammered out a few seconds ago. And Dick-na-Raheen, of all men! Well this is stranger news than I expected to hear. I may return now to the Crosses. By Jove! this has been a curious day and night, altogether! I have been often through a campaign without experiencing more adventures and surprises."

"What's that he said about the day being fixed? What the devil *did* he mean by that?" added the traveller, again stopping, as the thought flashed through his head. "It couldn't be that——. Pooh! the thing is absurd! nonsense! Still, what did he mean by it in talking of them. I declare to Heaven, I think that frightened idiot has imbued me with his own idiotic fears."

The traveller shook off impatiently, with an energetic movement of his shoulders, as if he were casting a load therefrom, the uneasy thoughts that pervaded him, and stepped out briskly into the boreen.

The night had been gradually freezing; the moon was high in the heavens, and thousands of stars studded its blue concavity with their twinkling light, and flung their silvery glory on the white world around; the snow felt crisp and pleasant under the foot; so, descanting all unpleasant thoughts, he hummed a strain of the Marsellaise, and stepped out briskly.

This time, however, he took the public road that led to the door of the hostelry, and was not long in arriving thereat.

"They are not gone to bed yet. There is light in the window still. Shall I tap at my sister's window, after the old fashion, or knock? God send that the're to the fore, and well. Here goes in the name of God!"

He had been some little time standing irresolutely before the door, before he could make up his mind what to do. Having at last arrived at the conclusion indicated in his words, he knocked.

There was no response.

He knocked again.

After a slight interval, the footsteps of some one approaching came to his ear, and in a second after the bolt was withdrawn, the lock was turned, the door opened, and the hostess stood before him with a lighted candle in her hands.

"Mother!"

Shading her eyes with her hands, the hostess glanced at the intruder for a second; then with a cry that startled the household, the candle dropped from her hand, and the sight left her eyes, as she threw her arms around his neck, and, half swooning, depended for support on the strong arm that encompassed her.

"Mother, mother, how are you? I am so glad to see you, How is Kitty?" cried the traveller, delightedly. "It's so long since I saw you. Oh, mother, how glad I am to be back with you again this blessed Christmas morning."

"Watt, asthor," said the mother, recovering her weakness and surprise, "It isn't you that's in id, is it? Oh, glory be to God, asthore machree! that I have lived to put my arms around your neck again! The blessing of God be about you, aroon asthor; where wor you these four long years?"

"I was many awhere, mother darling; but this is not the place to be talking. Is there anyone in the parlour?"

"Faix, an' it isn't Watt, honey, the place to be talkin' at all; but I couldn't think of anything else but," said the delighted woman, laughing and crying alternately, as she led the way into the parlour, "lookin' at you, my poor boy of the world!"

"Is there anyone here, mother?" motioning toward the parlour door, before he entered it.

"Sorra wan, a-jewel machree, Watt asthore, only Mehaul a-gow."

"Mehaul-a-gow, mother! What is he doing here so late? It must be near three o'clock. And so it is near three," glancing at the clock that stood in the kitchen.

"Watt, aroon, only I don't like to be mentionin' it to you, there was a man here last night that we'd rather not have the luck of——"

"I know, mother. I know who it was."

"You do, Watt, agra," said his mother, relaxing hold of him in her surprise. "God forbid that you'd see him or he'd see you."

"And you brought Mehaul here to keep you company?"

"No, Watt, agra, but he *was* here; an' we wouldn't let him go until mornin'. Here along wid a few boys—Ned the Thresher, Shaymus Morrissey——"

"Shaymus Morrissey!" echoed her son, "was he here? I saw *him* too."

A hearty fit of laughter broke from him as he remembered the meeting. But his mother, alarmed lest any of the household should hear him, placed her two hands on his arm affectionately, and led him into the room.

"Glory be to God and the Blessed Virgin, Mehaul, asthor!

look who we have here. See who's come back to us Christmas morning!"

"The Cross of Christ be about us, Watt! it's not yoursalf that's in it—is it?" said the smith in utter surprise.

"It's I, Mehaul, my old friend, come back for a few——"

But his words were cut short by the entrance of a young girl, whose arms, almost before he had time to see her, were flung around his neck, and her lips pressed to his face with kisses.

It was some time before Watt could loosen her hold on him, but when he did he drew her over to the light.

"Oh, Watt, Watt, have you come back to us at last? What kept you away from us, and where wor you?"

"Let me look at you, Kitty, and see if——God bless my soul! how you have grown, and how handsome you are! Why, Kitty, darling, how you have changed. I could not believe it." And Watt—for we now substitute that name for the appellation of Traveller No. 2—hugged his sister with admiring affection.

"Well, mother, isn't it delightful to come back and find you all so well?"

"And, Watt, asthor, wasn't it the kind heart you had to come back to us this Christmas mornin', and to remember us after four long years, an' we thinkin' you wor dead an' gone?"

"Faith, mother," said Watt, as he sat before the replenished fire, between his mother and sister, with a tumbler of steaming punch before him and another before Mehaul, "there never was a sun so bright in foreign skies that I did not think they were brighter above the Crosses; nor scene so fair that I thought could match the orchard outside in the month of June."

"My poor boy, Watt!" said the admiring and grateful mother.

"And I wonder you didn't write, Watt," said Kitty, as she passed her fingers through his hair, and wondered how the face that was so fair and white could have become so brown and swarthy.

"There was not much time for thinking where I was—still less for writing, Kitty."

"And where was that, Watt?"

"Some other time I'll tell you all about it. Let me hear the home news first. I'm burning to hear all the news since I went away."

"Mehaul here is the wan that can tell you all about that."

"Faix, a great many things have happened these four years; 'twouldn't be aisy to tell 'em all, Watt; but——" said the smith, with a quick glance at the mother, "if you'll ax me anything you'd like to know, sure I'll tell you."

The look and the quick glance indicated to the parties exchanging them that there was something in the course of things which had better not be told at present; and so with a tacit understanding that unpleasant matters should, for this night at least, be left untold, the pleasant discussion went on, whilst Mehaul and Watt, in the enjoyment of the time, took their tumblers.

We don't know that there is anything pleasanter in this world than the union of long-separated members of a family at the Christmas time, when the snow lies crisp and hard outside, and the wind moans through the trees. If to that be added pleasant converse, a cheerful fire, healthy frames, and the aroma of punch diffusing itself around the cosy apartment, it is the *summum bonum* of human happiness itself.

At least so all four there thought; and when a knock came to the door, repeated once or twice, and Mehaul, having volunteered to open it, returned with the news that his services in the capacity of bone-setter were hurriedly requisitioned, and that a car was waiting outside to convey him to his destination, a rude shock was received by all. They felt that the pleasantest evening—or rather night—it had been their good fortune to spend for many years had been rudely interrupted, and that the snows of many more Christmas nights might pass before such a delicious sense of comfort and happiness should nestle around the fireside and hearth.

Whether their forebodings were true or not is veiled in the mystic future, and can only be disclosed as our story proceeds.

But Mehaul was not a man to be daunted by sentimental considerations or forebodings. He was too inured to calls late and early, when his most useful gift required to be exercised; and from habit he would as soon think of refusing to extend a hand to a man drowning in the Slaney for fear

of wetting his feet as hesitate to go on a hurried message of of this kind because it would be necessary therefore to sacrifice some comforts.

Wherefore he was soon on the car and off, protected against the cold night air and the wreathing snow-blast blowing from the white-covered ridges of Mount Leinster by Watt's overcoat, which the latter had forced upon him.

After continuing the conversation in a dreamy sort of way, while the red fire died low and was surrounded by a rim of white ashes, or *greeshugh*, his mother suggested that the new-comer should toss off his tumbler of punch and retire to bed.

Christmas morning was, from time immemorial, an early one in country places. As a special mark of the solemnity of the occasion the people were awake, and the lights burning in their homes long before dawn.

First Mass was said early, at seven or eight o'clock, and as the chapels were few and far between, and the distances far, those who had intended to be present must needs be stirring betimes. Wherefore, Watt and his sister gladly acceded to their mother's suggestion, and in a short time the silence of the grave closed over the happy and once more united household; whilst Mehaul progressed on his cold journey to where, on the sloping hill-road, Traveller No. 1 lay tossing in unrest with his broken arm, fourteen long miles away.

CHAPTER VII.

GRACE COTTRELL.

THE winter winds might howl above the dreary wastes, and the snow blowing from the north lie heavy on path and fields and roadway, but within the comfortable farmhouse of Knock-raheen there was but little sign of cold or discomfort.

The farmhouse lay some distance from the river, towards which the rich and sloping meadow fields lay. In summer the morning sun shone pleasantly thereon, and in winter the ample out-offices and the shading groves kept out the north wind.

The house was a handsome two-storeyed one, much above the ordinary run of farmers' houses, as indeed the ample farm attached to it merited. Its white front, and gleaming windows, like burnished gold when the morning sun shone upon them, formed a pleasant object to travellers passing along the rich valley of the Slaney.

Withinside the scene corroborated the appearance of the outside. Like the kitchen of the Crosses, already described, the ample turf fire burned on the capacious hearth. Over the chimney hung heavy flitches of bacon and hams, whose dimensions showed that there was richness in the land. Two or three turkeys hanging from the sides of the wall, whose colours of rich yellow showed abundant feeding, and might well make the lips of an epicure water, were ready for the Christmas dinner.

The heavy spinning-wheel, of more than ordinary size, that stood at one side of the fire-place, with its reel of spun thread yet thereon, seemed in its massiveness in accord with the superior appearance of the surroundings. A pair of well-cleaned and bright fowling-pieces rested on the wall, at one side, whilst at the other the shining harness glowed again in the reflected light of the bog-wood blazing on the hearth.

At the other end of the kitchen, from the fire-place, a wall some dozen feet in height, separated the sleeping-places of the female servants from it ; the upper rooms looking on the kitchen, with only a few feet of wall between them, wherefrom the sleepers might, if they so wished when they woke, glance down on the dying embers cosily changing into white ashes.

The wall in which the huge chimney was placed, wherethrough the bright flame shot up, was the dividing one of the house, and the rooms at the back formed the more pretentious part of the building, in which the bedrooms of the family were situated, and the comfortable parlour, with its heavy mahogany furniture, and the many glass-faced presses in the walls, which were stored with china and plate and many other heirlooms handed down from forgotten generations.

This night in question, however, there was no sign of work in the kitchen. The spinning wheel, whose drowsy, half-musical whirr was usually heard when the night fell, lay

silent. The harness-making and other work which the men were accustomed to employ their hands at was also laid aside. It was Christmas Eve, and the household sat comfortably around the fire, whilst they were awaiting the usual time for retiring, engaged cosily chatting.

"An' do you think that's thrue, Matt?" asked one of the girls of one of the men who had been relating some occurrence, and was now engaged with a knitting needle refilling his pipe.

"Sorra wan ov meself knows, Nisthaus. I'm only tellin' you what she said; but, sure, God forgive her her sins! who'll mind her?"

"Who'll mind her, is id? Faix, an' there's many 'ud mind her—knolligeabler people than any ov us, aither. An', signs on id, so they ought!"

The speaker, who sat on the same short form or seat in front of the fire with the girl who had first spoken, shook his head significantly.

"Why, Morrough, why—what makes you say that?" she asked, laying her arm on his knee and looking up into his face.

"I've a raison ov me own for sayin' id, Nisthaus; an' so has many a wan as well as me."

"How? Why, Murrough, tell us?"

"No, Nisthaus," said he, looking down at her arm—which, if rough with work, was at all events, finely rounded—"there's things wan might tell, an' things wan mightn't, an' this last is wan ov 'em."

"An' shure you wouldn't believe, Murrough, that all them dhreadful things are goin' to happen?"

"I'd b'lieve anythin' she'd say," said Murrough in a low grave voice, that seemed to add weight to his words, "an' so would you all, too, if you knew as much as I do."

"Divil a heed I'd heed her," said the pipe-filler who had started the conversation by some previous narration.

"Be the snow outside, Matt, an' you might be wrong," said Murrough, somewhat warmly.

"Ah! what would she know, the ould fury," said Matt, contemptuously. "Sorra bit, but I wish she was out ov the counthry entirely. She's never athout some bad story or another in her mouth."

"An' if they wor thrue?"

"Thrue! Whin did she say anything that was thrue?"

"Didn't she, though?" said Murrough.

"Whin?"

"Many a time."

"Tell me wan."

"I'll tell you, thin, if you want to know. Didn't she tell Shawn, the boatman, when he wouldn't ferry her over the river, that sorra many more times he'd cross id himself until the wather wud be rollin' over him. An' don't we all know that it wasn't long afther until his corpse was dhragged up—God atune us an' harm!—from the mud in the Whinna Rua. An' didn't she tell Pether Fogarty—that you'd take a laise ov his life—whin he dhruv over her basket comin' from the fair, that he'd want the sight ov his eyes afore long. An' wasn't it thrue for her? Wasn't he found stark stone dead in his bed in the mornin' afore a week was over? Answer me that?"

"That's thrue enough, shurely," said Matt, giving up his contemptuous opposition very rapidly.

"Ay, I think so. An' what did she tell poor Dick—the Lord forgive the poor boy his sins, that wouldn't hurt a hair ov her head—when he pelted the snowballs at her? That his face, that was so ruddy then, would be, afore long, as cowld an' as white as the snow in his hand. An', faix,"—the speaker had sunk his voice almost to a whisper—"we know where the poor fellow was afore many days wor over his head."

"Oh, Murrough! for the love o' God, don't talk ov that. Don't tell us any more, or the life 'ud lave me," said Nisthaus, whose high colour rapidly toned down under the influence of these memories. "Don't speak ov poor Dick."

"No, they're not things to be talkin' of," assented Murrough, who having now satisfied all hands on the veracity of the person of whom they had been talking, was now prepared to drop further anecdotes of that character. "Only what I say is this: "I'd rather have her good word than her bad word any day; and faix, when she says that the ould graveyard 'll be fuller afore harvest than the *genshilawns* on Corrig Vore, I'm afeared somehow there's more throubles nor we're thinkin' ov afore the people.

"God forbid, Murrough!" said Nisthaus, fervently. "I'd like always to live the way I am, and I'd never like to see any wan in thrubble if I could help id."

"Faix an' I'm afeared, if it's to come, it will come; an nather you nor I can help id. Sure it's only what Columb cille prophesied long ago."

"And what was that?" inquired Maureen, who was sitting knitting at the front of the fire in silence.

"He said (if all we're tould is thrue) that there wasn't a house from the mountains to the river that wouldn't have a corpse in id when the moss was red in Corrig rock, an' that there would be more blood on the Bosheen in Ross than 'ud colour the Slaney, and that the hares 'ud be runnin' about the farms when there 'ud be nobody to——"

"An' whin was all that to happen?" interrupted Nisthaus, who shivered beside him at his catalogue of dire events.

"Whin the rockin' stone of Carrigvore would turn from white to red."

"Be the tares ov war, if it's not to be till then, it'll hardly be in our times, anyway, I'm thinkin'," said Matt cheerfully, taking the pipe from his mouth, and letting a cloud of smoke pass up the chimney.

"Whatever time it'll be," said Maureen, rising, "it's time for you and me, Nisthaus, to bring in the clothes off the hedge. They'll be as hard as *boorawns* be this wid the frost."

"It's almost afeared to come out I am," said Nisthaus. "I'm sorry we didn't bring 'em in earlier."

"Musha, you'd put the *sharruse* on a body, so you would," said Maureen, tying the handkerchief around her neck to keep out the cold when outside. "I dunno what you'll do whin you've a house ov yer own, an' nobody, then, but yer own self to keep you company."

"Oh, begorra," said Matt, promptly, "I'll be bound there'll be somebody there that'll be more company to her than if she had the full ov a chapel wid her."

"Ay, indeed," said Maureen, maliciously. "It's down the river gaffin' a salmon, or down in the bog afther a hare he'll be. Catch him athin, indeed."

"Oh, stop yer nonsense," said Nisthaus, the colour rising in her already attractive, if homely, features, at the insinuations, which she well understood the meaning of.

"Come, Maureen, I believe it is time they were brought in, anyhow."

The dread of going out into the night had less of terrors for her than the hail of good-natured sarcasm which she knew was sure to follow. The girls departed on their errand, whilst the men conversed around the fire.

"Whist! What's that?" asked Murrough, jumping up and listening, as a wild cry from one of the girls outside came on their ears.

The cry was repeated, and as the men made a movement towards the door, the two girls, pale and frightened, flew inwards through it, and hid themselves behind the men.

"O, Matt—oh, Murrough," panted Maureen.

"What's amiss, girls? What has frightened you? Did you see anything?"

"What is it, Nisthaus?" asked Murrough.

"Oh, there's—there's—somebody—a strange man in the byre."

"In the byre. A sthrange man in the byre. Did you see him?"

"Yes, yes," said Nisthaus, still sheltering herself between him and the fire.

"Begorra, this is very odd. Come, boys, until we see who it is. It's a quare time for any wan to be out on Christmas Eve."

The men hurried to the door.

"Oh, for God's sake, don't all go," shouted Maureen, in a frenzy of terror. "Let some one stay here with us, I'll die if you'll all go."

"Oh, for the love of the Blessed Virgin, stay wid us, Murrough," cried Nisthaus clinging to him.

"Ay do. Do you stop wid the girls, Murrough. Shawn an' I 'll go an' see what it is."

Murrough and the girls sat at the fire, the latter crouching into the snuggest corner of the fireplace.

"Did you see his face, girls?"

"Oh, don't spake ov id until they'll all come in. The life is thrimblin' in me." said Nisthaus.

"Maybe 'twas some of the neighbours. Who else could it be? Don't be frikenin' yourselves about nothin'. Why, if it was a ghost you seed——"

A cry from Nisthaus of shivering terror told him at once that he had taken but an indifferent method of restoring their confidence and courage.

"Well, well, Nisthaus and Maureen, we'll say no more about id. But don't be afeared. The sorra wan will come in here, you may depind."

So with an easy air of assurance, Murrough smoked his pipe; but with an ear intently listening for some word or call from his companions outside, and with a set posture of his limbs ready to spring forward if he heard it.

"By the varthu o' my oath, girls, but I think you must av been dhreamin'," said Matt, entering; "there wasn't as much as a collioch ov a beggar-man about the byre, nor in any other ov the outhouses aither, nor on the lofts, for we searched 'em all. Where did you think you saw the—the——," he was going to say "ghost," but he did not.

"Goin' into the byre," said Maureen, "among the cows."

"Are you sure? You couldn't be mistaken?"

"I don't think we could."

"There was some one there, for I saw him goin' in for sartin," said Nisthaus with more confidence.

"Then, girls," said Shawn, in a low, solemn tone, very impressively, "it was somethin' that wasn't right you saw, for the sorra one is there now, nor anywhere about."

A slight scream of terror from the girls was the answer to this alarming assertion; and they gathered together more closely than before around the fire, previously taking the precaution of heaping up more fuel thereon.

"Boys, did yez look to see if there were any prints of a man's foot on the snow outside?" asked Murrough.

"Ay, did we," said Shawn; "but with the tracks of the cows and the hardness ov the ground be raison of the frost, we couldn't make out wan."

"An' I'm sartin shure," said the third, "that if the snow was soft as the minit it fell, sorra tracks ov a man's foot we'd see. For no man could be there an' get away in that short time. Whatever else it was, it wasn't a livin' man anyhow."

"Did you see his face, Nisthaus?"

"I did," said Nisthaus. "I thought," said she, faintly, "that it was like the face of—of—of—Dick, the Lord have mercy on him!"

A shudder of surprise and awe went round the group, whilst Nisthaus cuggered closer on the seat to Murrough as she spoke.

"The Lord bless and save you, Nisthaus asthore! don't ever say that again. Why the life 'ud lave the poor Misthress up stairs; an' the fright 'ud never die out ov poor Miss Grace herself—the crathur!"

"Ay," assented Shawn; "'twould be only bringin' the ould thrubble fresh agin upon 'em—and sure they had enough ov id, Lord knows! 'Twas this night four years he was dhrowned."

"So it was," said Murrough in a whisper, "dhrowned or killed."

"Oh, don't! Shawn, don't spake any more about id!" said Maureen, in an excess of terror, and glancing at the window, whose unshuttered panes were white with frost. "Don't spake ov id any longer. Talk ov something else."

"At any rate, girls, don't let what you saw," said Murrough, with a solemnity which still more frightened the trembling girls, "pass yer own lips for the raisons I said. An' if—"

A cry from Maureen, whose eyes seemed to be fascinated by the window, interrupted the speaker, and made them all start from their seats.

"What is it, Maureen? What ails you?" was anxiously asked, as the startled eyes and white lips and face of the frightened girl unmistakably announced her terror.

"What is it? Spake, Maureen! What is it?"

"The window!" said Maureen, faintly. "There's somebody lookin' in at the window. *His* face."

All eyes were turned thereto. A shadow did, indeed, seem to be passing away therefrom! All at once, and with one accord, the men rushed to the door, unbolted it, and, flinging it open, rushed out into the bawn.

There was no one there. Again they searched the outhouses, the stable, the byre, the barn and the lofts, and the surroundings. There was no one there.

"I'm afeared, Maureen, you're too easy frightened," said Shawn, with a tone of annoyance and dissatisfaction in his voice. "It's only the blaze of the fire throwin' a shadow on the windy you saw."

"Not wan, Maureen, honey," said Murrough, more soothingly, "but the girls are always aisy frightened. God help 'em! I think it's time to go to bed! It's nigh twelve o'clock—if it isn't afther it."

"Oh, don't Murrough, don't lave the house yet a bit," said Nisthaus, who was terrified at the idea of the men, who slept on the stable loft, leaving the kitchen until the present alarm had subsided and their nerves grown a little more composed.

"Ay, but, Nisthaus, honey, you're to mind that to-morrow 'll be Christmas mornin', and we'll have to be up early."

"It'll be an idle day, Murrough," said Nisthaus, giving him a slight nudge of her elbow, which had a more prevailing effect than all the other arguments which she could advance.

"Thrue for you, Nisthaus, the devil a lie in that," said Murrough, promptly, "an' I don't see anywhere we can be more comfortable nor before this fire for a spell av an hour or two more. Faix, it's glad we ought to be to have it to sit at, an' so many poor fellows in Wicklow and the Barony Forth athout a roof to cover them or a fire to sit at."

"Faith," said Nisthaus," an' it's a cowld time to be athout wan or the other. What's the raison av it?"

Nisthaus was grateful to her companion for so readily acceding to her wishes, and moreover was glad that the conversation was likely to take any other turn than the somewhat nerve-disturbing groove it had run in during the night.

"Is id the raison ov id you're askin', Nisthaus? It's aisy tellin'. It's all the doin' of the sojers and the yeomen. There's parts of this county where they're not lavin' a roof they don't burn nor a haggard they don't set fire to."

"God bless us!—what are they doin' that for?"

"For what, but because they have the power, an' there's not anybody to stop 'em. An' begorra from all I hear I wouldn't be surprised iv——"

"There's somebody runnin' across the bawn!" cried Maureen again, whose quick ear and strained attention had heard a footstep across the hard snow.

"You're right this time, Maureen, surely," said Shawn

jumping to his feet, "an' more betoken the foot is comin' to the doore."

It was coming to the door—coming very rapidly, too—so rapidly, indeed, that almost before he had finished speaking a hurried and tumultuous rapping beat at the bolted door.

"Bloody wars!" ejaculated Murrough, following Shawn to the door, "there's something quare outside. Hurry, Shawn. Take out the boult. Take out the boult, or, be the night that's in it! the doore 'll be bruck!" as a repeated and prodigious thundering commenced thereat again, which seemed to indicate that it would.

"Who are you? What d'ye want?" cried both men, as, the door opening, a figure rushed past them into the kitchen.

"Oh, for the love of the livin' God, give me shelther!" he cried, bursting forward into the firelight.

"It's Shaymus Morrissy. What's amiss wid you, Shaymus?" asked Shawn in astonishment.

"Dick—Dick-na-Raheen! He's appearin'! I've seen him," faltered Shaymus; and in a second more he had reeled, and would have fallen on the floor if Shawn had not caught him in his arms.

"He has fainted! Glory be to God! Close the doore, boys, and kum in. I think he's dead!"

The men rebolted the door and hurried in. They laid the visitor down in front of the fire, with his back to the settle; and, from his white lips and face, upturned eyes, and frothing mouth, it was evident he was in a fit, and it seemed probable enough that fit was death.

"He's got a fright," said Murrough, "somehow, an' he's fainted. Bring a little salt, someone, to put in his mouth. This bates all," continued he in much perplexity, glancing at Nisthaus, who, now more alarmed than ever, was quite unable to move.

At this moment the parlour door opened, and a young girl, bearing a lighted candle, entered. She had heard the rapping at the door, and wondering what could have caused the unusual noise, came from her bedroom, where she had been sitting at the fire preparatory to retiring to rest, to make inquiries.

The light falling on the girl's face disclosed one of singular and unusual beauty. Her long dark tresses, unloosed for

the night, fell to her waist and strayed over her face and neck.

The colour of the straying tresses contrasted beautifully with the marble whiteness of her forehead, whilst her delicate drooping eyelashes veiled two eyes of striking and attractive brightness. The rounded contour of her face and the small berry-coloured lips were thrown into fine relief by the light of the candle she carried in her hands. Her slender form was the essence of gracefulness, and the white tapering hand that held the light was as if moulded by an artist. A gold ring gleamed upon her finger.

Her sudden appearance, and her singular and extraordinary beauty, might easily have conjured up to the eye of a stranger a far more unearthly vision than any that disturbed the peace of the household.

"What is the noise about, Maureen?" she asked; but, her eyes falling on the swooning figure of Shaymus, she drew back in alarm. "What is this, Murrough? What has happened?"

"It's only Shaymus Morrissy, Miss Grace," said Murrough hastily, lest anyone else might blurt out the truth to her. "He's got a fright ov some kind—or got a wakeness; but he'll be all right in a minute or two."

"Was it he that knocked?"

"Faix, an' it was, Miss Grace; an' you'd think he'd tare down the house he was in such a hurry."

"Is he—is he very ill?" asked the young girl compassionately.

"He'll be all right in a minit. He's only got a wakeness wid the cowld ov the night. It's a quare time for him to be out. It's too much dhrink he's taken, I think," said Murrough, on consideration.

"He seems to be very ill," said Grace in alarm.

"Oh, the devil an ill, Miss Grace," said Murrough, cheerfully, as if it were rather an agreeable feature on a Christmas night to have a swooning figure on the hearth than otherwise.

"It was well you were not gone to bed, or the poor fellow might have died at the door."

"Faix there wasn't much fear ov that," said Murrough, with a smile, as the remembrance of the tan-ta-ra-ta the fugitive had given came on his mind; "but whether or no,

Miss Grace, you'd better go to bed. It's not an hour for *you* to be up, nor a sight for *you* to be lookin' at. *We'll* mind him, never fear."

"He's recovering," said Grace.

"So he is, Miss Grace," said Murrough, looking at the swooning man, who soon recovered from his fit, and opened his eyes with a faint question—

"Where am I?"

"Arrah, where are you, Shaymus, where but snug and comfortable at a fine fire? An' faix it's at your own you ought to be four hours ago, forby walkin' about like a ghost ov a Christmas night."

"Is *he*—is *he* gone?" asked Shaymus, looking around with a fixed look of terror, which Grace perceiving, became greatly alarmed.

"Arrah! hould your tongue, you awmadhaun!" said Murrough angrily. "It's ashamed o' yerself you ought to be night-walkin' this a-way. See now, Miss Grace," continued he, addressing his young mistress, "go to yer bed, and don't be runnin' a chance of ketchin yer death of cowld because an ownshuch like this gets afeard ov an ould bush he sees in the night; do, now."

"Do you think, Murrough, a little——." Here Grace whispered something into Murrough's ear.

"Faix an' it would, Miss Grace," said Murrough with a droll smile, "av it wouldn't be a sin to give id to such an ownshuch."

"I daresay it wouldn't do anyone here any harm," said Grace, interpreting the grin on Murrough's face, and smiling pleasantly herself in response. Indeed, from the bright sparkle in her eye when she did so, it would seem as if smiling came very natural to her, and that her handsome face, though now pallid by the sudden surprise, had the air of one to whom happiness was not unusual, and whose lips readily wreathed themselves with its welcome signs.

"Arrah, to be sure it wouldn't, Miss Grace, honey," said Murrough, airily; "the blessing ov God be about you for thinkin av id! Be the morthyal frost! bud it's a bad wind that blows good to nobody; and who'd ever think that this night-walkin' owmadhaun——? Hould up yer head an' sit up man, an' don't be talkin'!"

The last portion was addressed to the invalid, who, with his eyes still fixed in terror, began to mutter something incoherently.

"There now, Miss Grace, that'll do. Go to your bed an' God bless you," said Murrough, in his anxiety pushing her gently away, to prevent her hearing what Shaymus said.

"Very well, Murrough, I suppose I had better," said Grace, much amused at Murrough's entreaties, but far from divining the reason. "Come with me, Maureen."

"Aye do, Maureen. Go at wanst," said Murrough, catching the girl by the arm, and swinging her good-humouredly forward. "Never refuse a good offer, Maureen—even if it wor a gay fellow axin' you to marry him."

"Be the tares o' war, you thief o' the world," said Murrough, approaching the stranger, when the young girl had gone, "only for the good luck you brought wid you I'd have a great mind to give you a trouncin' that 'ud put the fear av ghosts out o' your noddle for one while. 'Twas the blessin' av God you didn't say what you war goin' to say afore the poor girl's own face, you villain!"

With which consoling assurance Murrough lifted him up on a chair.

"How d'ye find yourself now? Oh, be all the turf on Carrig bog, Maureen, but you're an angel ov light—divel a less," ejaculated Murrough, as the girl reappeared with a bottle of brandy. "More power to the ghosts. I beg your pardon, Nisthaus, honey; I didn't mane it. Has nobody an eggshell or a noggin handy?"

A copper measure was quickly brought by Shawn from the dresser.

"It's always the girls that's helped first," pursued Murrough, in rollicking good humour at the sight of the brandy; "but seein' you're no betther than an ould woman, Shaymus achorra, we'll give you the first taste ov id."

"Ah, that's putting the colour back into your face; an' faix, between you and me, that phiz av yours wanted it. It's the quare taste the colleen 'ud have that 'ud think you handsome this minit."

"Here, girls, Maureen, Nisthaus; here, take a thimbleful ov this. Arrah, don't be makin' faces at it, Nisthaus, an' id

after comin' all the way from France. God bless Boney, anyway. That's the style, Maureen. That's what'll touch the cockles av your heart."

When Murrough, in his rollicking style, had attended to the wants of the three mentioned, he sat himself down on a seat before the fire, in which example he was followed by the other two servants.

"I've always heerd that the parson christens his own child first; more power to him; he knows what's right, divil a lie in id, if it was only to know how to get the tithes handier—so Shawn and Matt, if it's plazin' to you, I'll take the first," said Murrough, filling a measure of brandy and drinking it off.

"Here, Shawn, take that off. And so, Shaymus—here, pull over your seat to the fire—you saw a ghost, did you?"

"Ay, did I," said Shaymus, now considerably recovered from his fright, partly by the company around him and more by the liquor he had taken. "It's little I thought an' I kumin' from Clohogue, that I'd see him after four years in the river."

"Whist, you frightened ownshuch! How dar you talk iv sich a thing in this house? Where did you get the fright?"

"At the stile be the ould *rath*. And you may talk as you like, Murrough O'Brien, but I saw him as plain as I see you now."

"Well, bad scran to me! but what comedher is over me that I don't break your neck wance for all, just to keep your foolish tongue from waggin'," said Murrough, turning around to Shaymus indignantly.

"Aye, an' more nor me saw him this blessed night," said Shaymus boldly, who although a great coward where spirits were in question, had but little of the coward in him when a fellow-being grew disputatious with him.

"More nor you saw him?" asked Murrough, looking fixedly at him with great seriousness. "Who?"

"'Torney Gordon."

"'Torney Gordon!"

"Yes, his very self."

"Is it Gordon, the tithe proctor?"

"No other."

"He did? An' where did *he* see him?"

"In the Forge ov Clohogue."

Murrough paused a little as he received this most unexpected answer. His rollicking humour quickly passed from him, and he sat silently gazing at the visitor.

"Well, at any rate, you needn't be afeerd any more to-night," said Murrough after a pause; "it must be close on one o'clock now, an' we all know ghosts can't be out later nor twelve."

"It was afther twelve whin I saw *him*," said Shaymus nervously.

"No, indeed," said Murrough earnestly. "You're more nor an hour here, an' it's not wan yet. Everybody knows what I'm sayin' is thrue. Sperrits can't walk afther twelve, so you'll be safe goin' home. If you like I'll go a bit of the way wid you."

"I'm goin' now," said Shaymus, who took this as a civil hint to be going.

He was correct in this interpretation, but far from correct in the reasons for it. It was from no sense of inhospitality that Murrough hinted his departure. Far from it.

"Here, Shaymus, take another dhrop ov this. It's Christmas mornin', an' it'll do you no harm. Come now."

Murrough tied the ends of his flannel jacket more tightly around his waist and emerged into the bawn with his companion. Thence they turned by a gateway into the narrow lane that ran at the back of the house.

"See, now, Shaymus," said Murrough, when they had gone some distance, "what's that you said about 'Torney Gordon an' the Forge of Clohogue?"

"'Torney Gordon saw somethin' there," said Shaymus, cautiously.

"He did—did he? What did he see? Tell me all about it?"

His companion narrated all the circumstances with which we are already conversant, whilst Murrough lent an attentive ear.

"Well, Shaymus, I'd ask you to say nothin' about this night's doin's," said Murrough, thoughtfully; "but as there's so many knowin' ov id, there 'ud be no use in stoppin' one mouth when there are so many tongues ready to talk."

"Why, don't you b'lieve——"

"I dunno what to b'lieve, Shaymus," said Murrough, perplexedly; "but anyhow go straight home. You'll be all right now. Good night. You know the short cut."

"Yes, I know the short cut," said Shaymus. "Good night."

And they separated—Murrough to turn into the house, and Shaymus to run at his dead best along the lane. With what fortune—in the way of escaping from ghosts—we know.

"Saw Dick, did they?" thought Murrough to himself. "Be the powers of war, that's mighty strange. An' id only bears out what I was thinkin' long enough. What brought that unlucky thief, the procthor, around the place this Christmas night? The divil's good luck to him, late an' airly. It's all very sthrange. But I suppose I will know something more about id sooner or later."

With which dubious reflection Murrough passed into the house.

"Well, Murrough, did you speed him off?"

"I did," said Murrough; "did ye think we wor goin' to waste our night talkin' to an ownshuch like that?"

"But, Murrough, wasn't it very quare that he should have seen——"

"Arrah, don't be botherin' us wid your 'seein'.' Who'd mind *him* what he seen, or what he didn't see?"

"You don't think ——"

"I don't think nothin'," said Murrough, "about anythin'. Who's got the brandy? My feet are dead cowld standin' in the lane. Oh! my darlint you wor, for a brandy bottle—though, yer sowl to glory, Nisthaus, aroon!—I don't think it can ever bate the whiskey! Anhyow, here's the health ov Ireland; an' more power to her. My heart is as heavy as lead wid your ghosts an' your spirits, so that I'll sing a stave ov a song."

"Musha do, Murrough," said Nisthaus, putting her two hands on his shoulders behind and giving him an encouraging shake; "we're as gloomy as a pack ov bogheenth laghs."

"What 'll I sing?" asked Murrough.

"Sing the 'Hurlers of Marley,'" said Shawn.

"Sing the 'Banks ov Blackwather,'" said Matt.

"No, Murrough, don't. Sing 'the French are on the Say,'" said Nisthaus.

"Arrah, Nisthaus! sit down here beside me. To be sure I will. Give me another swig ov that brandy. Your health, Boney!"

And at once, in a rich musical voice, he commenced the following song, very popular in the country districts at the time :—

Oh, the French are on the say,
Says the Shan-van-Vocht,
Oh, the French are on the say
Says the Shan-van-Vocht;
The French are on the say,
They'll be here athout delay,
And the tyrant shall decay,
Says the Shan-van-Vocht.

What will the yeomen do?
Says the Shan-van-Vocht.
What will the yeomen do?
Says the Shan-van-Vocht—
What *should* the yeomen do
But give up the red and blue,
And promise to be true
To the Shan-van-Vocht.

Where will they pitch their camp?
Says the Shan-van-Vocht,
Where will they pitch their camp?
Says the Shan-van-Vocht;
On the Curragh of Kildare,
And Lord Edward will be there,
And our pikes in good repair,
Says the Shan-van-Vocht.

What colour shall be seen?
Says the Shan-van-Vocht,
What colour shall be seen?
Says the Shan-van-Vocht.
What colour *should* be seen
But our own immortal green?
That's the colour shall be seen,
Says the Shan-van-Vocht.

Will Ireland then be free?
Says the Shan-van-Vocht.
Will Ireland then be free?
Says the Shan-van-Vocht;

Yes; Ireland shall be free
From the centre to the sea,
And—Hurrah for Liberty!
Says the Shan-van-Vocht.

Oh! the French are on the say,
Says the Shan-van-Vocht;
They'll be here without delay——"

"Faix there'll be some wan here athout delay," said Shawn. 'There's a car afther comin' into the bawn through the gate."

"Is there?" asked Murrough, suddenly stopping in his song.

"There is, an' be the same token, there's a hand on the latch."

Whilst he spoke, the door (which Murrough on entering had forgotten to bolt) was opened, and the group were thunderstruck to see enter 'Torney Gordon.

All stood up.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ACCEPTED SUITOR.

It was quite as much out of surprise as of respect that the little group stood up at the entrance of the attorney.

"Sit down; don't stand up, boys and girls," said the visitor most complacently. "I called on my way, as I knew you'd be up, Christmas morning."

"Take a sate, sir," said Nisthaus, motioning him to one.

"Thanks, my good girl. Don't disturb yourselves. Who was singing? I like that air. 'The French are on the Sea.' It's a fine song. Would you be so kind," said the attorney, "as to sing it again?"

There was no response, however, to this courteous appeal; but a warning wink to Shawn, thrown by Murrough across the visitor's shoulder, seemed to imply that he had no great belief in the patriotic fervour of the new-comer.

Indeed, it would be difficult for him to form any such opinion, for 'Torney Gordon was notorious for feelings quite

the other way, disguised, indeed, as well as he could, from the people with whom he was brought in contact; but for all that, a violent partisan against the popular feeling when mixing with the higher classes of the county. Nominally a Catholic, he was of the people in his belongings. Rather he ought to be, for, a foundling originally, he had been brought up by the former parish priest of the neighbourhood, whose kindness to the forgotten child had caused him to be well educated, apprenticed to an attorney in Wexford, and placed in position in the neighbourhood where he had been brought up.

Birchwood Gordon, for so he had been christened, partly in compliment to the place wherein he had been found, was brought from his business qualities into connection with many of the county families. The position of tithe proctor had been added by this influence to his other avocations, and as the emoluments of both were at the time large, he rapidly advanced in prosperity until he had become more than usually wealthy for one in his station.

Birchwood, through his new connections, aspired to higher honours and positions. Still, however, he kept up his connection with the people, who indeed were withal the mainstay of his profession; and as the duties of Proctor were mainly discharged by subordinates, the ill-feeling and hatred which followed the execution of the duties mainly rested with the latter.

Possessed of an unusually bland and pleasant manner when he chose, he was able to pacify those who came to complain of the rapacity and rashness of his officers, and, whilst he pocketed the handsome profits of each transaction, the latter came in for the blame and contumely.

With all this, however, there were some who traced home to him in their own minds much of the hardships the people underwent in carrying out these oppressive laws. Many distrusted him because of his close friendship with the county magnates—alien to them in religion and interests. Others, again, persuaded by the charm of his manner, could not but look upon him as a protector of the people, and believed that but for him the sufferings and hardships they had undergone and were undergoing would be greater.

We have been at some pains to describe him, because his

name formed the subject of a conversation between Mehaul-a-Gow, or Mehaul-na-Corriga, as he was called (mainly because of his great strength and powerful build and his patience) and the injured Traveller; and also because he will turn up pretty often in our story.

CHAPTER IX.

MEHAUL'S ADVENTURES.

"THEY tell me you are very clever," said the traveller, after Mehaul had set the fractured limb which, in his convulsive turnings, the sufferer managed to break again.

"I'm behouldin' to the neighbours for their good word," said Mehaul, modestly.

"You attend a good many cases, I suppose?"

"Nearly all that happens in the Duffrey—anyhow?"

"The Duffrey—what is that?"

"That's the name of the place you're in—the name of the barony."

"Ah! now I remember. I've heard that name before. It is a disturbed portion of the country—is it not?"

"Disturbed! sorra disturbed. The divil a quieter portion of Ireland at present."

"That is not the character I have heard of it."

"An' what carachther did you hear of it? asked Mehaul unconcernedly.

"Why, that it is very disloyal—that it is honeycombed—ay, that's the word—honeycombed with illegal and disloyal associations."

"Where did you hear that?"

"In Dublin."

"An' who tould you?"

"Well, upon my word, you ask me a question I can hardly answer you. I can't say at present. Do you know Mr. Birchwood Gordon hereabouts?"

"Is it 'Torney Gordon you mane?"

"I believe he is an attorney; or something of that kind."

"Arrah to be sure I do. Well, was it he tould you?"

"I believe it was—at least I think so."

"Do you know what I'm going to tell you?"

"No."

"Well, it's this: I wouldn't b'lieve a word that kem out ov his head, nor his sworn oath against a dog."

"Yet he holds a prominent position among the people and among the gentry, I'm told."

"Whatever he houlds," said Mehaul, "what I'm spakin' is the truth. Are you goin' to remain long in this part?"

"I suppose I must stay some time now; but I only intended to spend a few days at Colonel Victor's."

"At Colonel Victor's! Was it there you wor goin'?"

"Yes; you appear to know him."

"Av coorse. Is it a man livin' in the Duffrey and not to know him? I do, and sorra much but what is good I know ov him. It would be a quare place only for him."

"What do you mean by a queer place?"

"Faix, what I mane I mane; an' if the Duffrey isn't as bad as other places—if people's houses aren't burned over their heads as they are in other places—who may we thank but him? Long life to him."

"I am glad he is so well liked. I should have expected nothing else from the little I know of him."

"It would be a different counthry but for him," said Mehaul, "but there's more, and 'Torney Gordon is wan ov 'em, that 'ud soon, if they had their way, disturb the counthry."

"You don't like Mr. Gordon, it is evident," said the traveller frankly.

"I nayther like him nor mislike him. I have no consarn with him, good or bad."

"Well, take off that tumbler. When will you call over to see me again?"

"I don't think I'll come sooner nor Saint Stephen's Day, or the day after. But you needn't be afraid. Your arm'll get on well; betther, maybe, nor if all the doctors in Dublin set it."

"I am sure it will. I have every confidence in your skill, I shall settle your bill next day, or any time you like."

"Bill—bill for what?"

"For the kindness you have done for me—for setting my poor broken arm."

"Oh, the sorra a farthing you'll pay me for that. What I never did, nor my father, nor gran'father afore me, I'm not goin' to do now."

"You don't mean to say that I must take your services and attention for nothing. That would be monstrous."

"I'm afeard you must," said Mehaul resolutely, though good humouredly, "if you take 'em at all. Do you know that if I wor to charge a penny, the nollidge that's come to me wouldn't be worth a farthin' to me."

"I don't clearly understand."

"Well, it's this—it's been always known to me, and those that went afore me, that this skill is only to be given for the love of God, an' not for money; an' if I wor to take payment, sorra bit ov the skill or nollidge I'd have in my head or my fingers any more.

"Oh, well, under these circumstances I shall not press it. And perhaps, as I have put you to so much trouble, I may put you to a little more?"

"You may, if it's nothin' unraisonable."

"I hope it is not. It is this—not to tell at Colonel Victor's that I am here; not to mention it at all in the neighbourhood."

"That I'll do wid a heart and a half. An' now, as the day will be nigh breakin' afore I get back to Clohogue, I'll be sayin' good-bye."

"Good-bye. Pleasant Christmas to you."

"Same to you."

"I am afraid that's hardly possible," said the traveller regretfully.

"Sorra bad thing can happen but worse might come—so be as happy as you can."

With which cheerful advice the village surgeon left the apartment, and after a short gossip with the people of the house proceeded on his way.

As the night was freezing intensely, and had grown even colder with the waning hours, Mehaul abandoned the car after an hour's travelling, and intimated his intention of walking the remainder. It was earlier than he thought, for the cottages along side the road were still wrapped in darkness and there was no one stirring on the way as he walked.

"An' so 'Torney Gordon was spakin' that a-way about the Duffrey. It's as well to know that. I always thought he was a desavin' villian. An' I'm afeard some o' the people wor too loose spakin' wid him. Howsumdever, it's as well to know that. Sorra bit, but I'm glad I kum, if its' only to learn that much. Bloody wars! what's that?"

The exclamation was drawn from him by the shrill cries of a woman's voice in distress. It rose on the still night air with startling effect.

"That's a sthrange cry to hear of a Christmas mornin'. Glory be to God? What can it be at all?"

The cottage from which the cries of agony proceeded was at the end of a short boreen or lane. Mehaul could with difficulty perceive the roof of the cottage from where he stood.

When he had proceeded a few steps he came to a turning whence he could see the cabin more readily.

The door was opened, and a light was burning. He could see a woman's form moving about within; but occasionally she came to the door, as if to give vent (to the listening night) to her cries.

"Isn't this where Ned the Thrasher lives?" thought Mehaul to himself. "Sorra bit o' me would know id wid the snow around. And that's Kitty's voice I hear. I wondher what's amiss. It can't be anything that's asthray wid Ned himself. It's only a few hours since he was at the Crosses. God bless us! that's an awful cry. It goes to my heart to hear a woman cryin'—cryin' of a Christmas mornin', too, whin everybody else is rejoicin'. There it is again! Be all that's good! there's somethin' very sthrange here."

Mehaul hurried down the lane, emerged into the bawn, and advanced towards the door.

To his great surprise the woman who was standing there, making the air ring with her cries, as soon as she saw the figure advancing, closed the door, bolted it, extinguished the light, and ceased her lamentations.

"Be the morthyal frost!" exclaimed Mehaul, "this bates Banagher out and out. It can't be that she knows me, or she wouldn't close the doore agin *me*; anyhow, I'll see what's amiss."

Mehaul was not the man to turn away from anything or any place which he had an intent on seeing because of any

slight repulse he met. So crossing the bawn, he reached the door and promptly knocked thereat.

There was no response from within. No cry came to announce sorrow or death.

Applying his ear to the keyhole, he listened attentively. The low moaning and stertorous breathing of a sick man came on his ears.

"It's Ned the Thresher himself that's sick or dying," thought he. "But why need she cry so loud when he is not dead? I wonder what's amiss with him. I'll see. Why, it's only a few hours since I parted wid him."

"Kitty, Kitty, open the doore. It's I that's in it, Mehaul —Mehaul-na-Corriga—Mehaul-a-Gow! Don't you know my voice? Open the doore."

The light of the candle immediately appeared through the keyhole and the chinks of the door, and at once the bolt was withdrawn and the door opened.

"Oh, Mehaul, Mehaul! 'twas God sent you; an' shure He niver sent you to a more afflicted house," cried the woman whom he had called, bursting out with a keen so full of woe and sorrow that Mehaul drew back a pace.

"What's amiss, Kitty, achorra? Don't cry like that, aroon. Is it anything that's amiss with Ned?"

"Oh, wirra, wirrasthru! that I should see this Christmas mornin'. Oh, Christ crucified, look down upon me!"

Her cries, unheeding of his question, were poured out without intermission as she stood with hands uplifted, on the threshold of the door.

"See, Kitty," said Mehaul, when he had recovered himself, laying his hand on her shoulder, "There is naither sinse nor raison in this. Tell me what's amiss, and maybe we can do somethin' better nor this."

Without responding to his words the woman walked inside, and with her Mehaul.

On a *shass* of newly-pulled rushes, in a corner by the fire, over which a sheet was thrown, through which latter the melted snow of the rushes was exuding, lay the form of a man fully dressed.

His hat was off, but around his forehead was roughly bound a white linen bandage, marked with deep stains of blood, that from a wound beneath it had welled up through

the folds of linen. His face was white and bloodless, made to seem more so by the stream of blood that had been roughly washed therefrom. The white woollen jacket which he wore, the ends of which were knotted around his waist after the usual manner of workmen, was also red-stained. The form lay perfectly still, the hands folded negligently across his breast; and, save the heavy breathing, and the rise and fall of the breast with the tremendous strength of the pulsations of the heart, there was no indication of consciousness or life.

Mehaul stood silently for a brief space in mute surprise, looking at the form at his feet.

"God save us an' bless us, Kitty asthore," he said in a startled whisper, "what happened him?"

The voice of the woman had ceased, either awaiting his silent diagnosis, or because the frightful sight before her hushed her instinctively into silence.

"He kem to the doore just as you see him, only he hadn't the bandage on," whispered the woman, with difficulty restraining herself from giving vent to her hysterical feelings.

"Is he badly hurt, an' how did it happen?" queried Mehaul in another whisper, glancing at Kitty, whose hands, compressed on her temples, seemed to be trying to keep the burning affrighted thoughts from bursting through them.

"He only said 'The sogers.' I was waitin' up for him an' I heard his step. But he fell in'ards, just as I opened the doore, sayin' 'The sogers! Kitty, the sogers.'"

"The sogers?" said Mehaul in great surprise; "I never heard of 'em comin' into this neighbourhood. But," added he, checking himself, "that's not the talk now. Kitty achorra!—an' God help you this night!—d'ye think you'd be able to look on if I was to take off the bandage, an' see how it is? I'll want somebody to help me—an' there's no one near but yourself."

Kitty made no response, but closed her hands more firmly over not only her temples but her eyes, as if excluding, or seeking to exclude, the sight of the dreadful wound.

"But if you're not able to look on, just go into your room and I'll help myself—only lave me a cup of wather an' a towel."

The woman, at this suggestion, removed her hands.

"I'll stay an' do whatever I can," she whispered, as if in a spasm.

"God bless you for that," said Mehaul compassionately, kneeling down beside the insensible form, and carefully unfastening the bandage, which her hands in their palsied fright and terror had wound roughly around the forehead.

"Howld the candle a little lower, Kitty achorra. There, that'll do. Get me a little warm wather. It's in the kettle on the fire. God help you; you can hardly see it. There now, stand aside a little."

The removal of the blood-stained bandage disclosed a fearful sight. A deep cut extended across the length of his right temple, and the gaping wound was full of blood. It must have bled a great deal, since his face was perfectly livid and pallid.

"That's a clip ov a swoord for sartin, Kitty," said Mehaul as soon as he had washed and examined it; "but I don't think they have cut through the bone, though they have cut into it. 'Twas a back-hand wipe he got—wid the point."

"Will he die?" asked the woman, as she trembled from head to foot with convulsive terror.

"Wid the blessin' ov God he won't. But I can't say for sartin at present. We must only hope for the best. Don't stir that bandage until I come back. I won't be more than a minit or so."

"Oh, Mehaul, sure you're not goin' to lave us?" almost shrieked the woman, as she saw him move towards the door, his words having failed to reach her ears, her senses being half paralysed with affright and sorrow.

"No, Kitty, asthore, I'm not goin'—I'm only goin' into the field for a few minits. I'll be back at wanst. Faix, it's sorry I'd be to lave you or poor Ned, an' he in such a condition. Close the doore an' put out the light till I come back. I'll take the candle wid me."

Not waiting for her to close the door after him, the smith latched it himself as he departed. Then, going into a field beside the house, he selected a spot where the field sloped slightly, and from the brow thereof removed the snow with his hands.

"This isn't it," he said, as he pulled up a weed or two

and examined them—" nor this, nor this. I'd a almost swore I'd a found it here. It ought to be growin' here. I'll thry a little further over."

Leaving this place, he commenced a fresh exploration some distance away, with equal fruitlessness—if one were to judge from his increasing restlessness and his muttered soliloquy to himself.

" Ma chorp an dhoul (God forgive me for cursin', this blessed an' holy Christmas mornin') ! but I'm afeard of me life it's not growin' here at all. The Lord presarve us, that 'id be awful an' poor Ned wantin' it so badly. Begorra, an' I'm greatly afeard it isn't here," said Mehaul, holding the candle with one hand, and with the back of the other wiping away the perspiration from his forehead. "He'll die afore mornin', afore the first Mass is over in Boolavogue, if I don't get it. I'll thry another place, in the name of God."

The terror he now experienced at his disappointment was not much inferior to that of the wife shivering with affright in the darkened cabin inside.

" Oh, glory be to God ! this is it at last. Be the blessed sky, I'd rather it this minit than to find a crock of goold. Ay ! this is you an' no mistake," said the smith again, closely examining the herb by the spluttering and swaying light of of the candle. " An' there is another—an' another—an' another," as he plucked greedily the uncovered herbs, examined them, and discarded the worthless ones. " I've enough now, praises be to His holy name ! " extinguishing the candle, and hurrying back into the cabin.

Crushing the ragged-looking herb—in shape, with its extended arms, not unlike the figure of an old man—in a wooden noggin, with the end of a billhook handle, he speedily took off the bandage, cleaned the cut, closed it, and placed the herb, now crushed into a soft pulpy mass, over it ; firmly tied on the bandage with skilful hand ; and then opened his breast to see if he were wounded elsewhere.

" No, Kitty," said he, with much satisfaction, as he stood up from his knees. " He has only got the wan cut. A little more an' twould be enough for him. It's little I thought I'd see him this way, when he was lavin' the Crosses, after the the stars were out on the sky."

" What d'ye think of him now, Mehaul, agra ? " asked

Kitty—her white face turned up to his with a look of agonised appeal.

"I think he'll get over it," said Mehaul confidently.

"Oh, Mehaul, agra, the blessin' ov God an' His Holy Mother be about you, for——"

"Don't kneel, Kitty asthor"—the poor creature in her thankfulness, was kneeling before him—"get up. What would you kneel to me for? What have I done?"

"Done. Oh, what haven't you done. Shure it's you're the good frind, the light ov God to your feet wherever you go."

"Sorra haporth I've done, Kitty agra, but what I'd do for any poor crathur, much less for poor Ned there, God relieve him. But sit down, Kitty, and tell me—where wor the sojers? This is the first time I heerd of 'em comin' around this counthry."

"Sorra wan o' me knows, more nor the words I tould you she said. Shure they might aisy pass by over the snowy roads an' nobody to hear 'em."

"That's thrue," said Mehaul, thoughtfully, as he searched in his pockets for his pipe to while away the time whilst he kept the afflicted woman company until the day broke. "So they might. I wondher where wor they goin'."

"Poor Ned, he—oh, oh, Mehaul, agra," burst out the poor woman in a fit of passionate trembling and crying.

"Don't now, Kitty avourneen. What good 'll crying do you? He'll be all right, never fear. You were goin' to say somethin' about him."

"Only that they must have met him somewhere near the head ov the lane—or he'd never be able to stagger home."

"I'm thinkin' he must ha' lain down, stunned like, afther he got the blow, an' when he recovered, staggered home. The cowld, maybe, recovered him. He lost too much blood for 'id to have happened near, bekaise you see—but what the dhoul is this?"

Mehaul had been searching with his hands, in an absent way, in the pockets of his coat for his pipe, forgetting that the heavy outside coat he had on was not his, but that of Traveller No. 2, when his hand, touching on something, heavy and unusual to his own pockets. drew forth that exclamation from him.

"What the dhoul is this?" exclaimed Mehaul a second time, as he drew forth the article that had arrested his attention. "A pistol. How did I kum be that? Oh, ay, I remember."

"An' a fine wan it is, too—sorra finer barrel ever I seed afore, an' I handled a good many of 'em in me time."

"Mehaul," said Kitty, who whilst he handled the pistol with knowing and capable glance, sat rocking herself in sorrow and affliction on the low straw seat, otherwise called a "boss," with her eyes fixed on the still unconscious form.

"Ay, Kitty—what is it?"

"Would it be any harm to give him a drop of somethin'—a little spirits?"

"He couldn't take it, Kitty acushla. Don't you see he couldn't?"

"We might put a little of it between his lips."

"Don't mind it now. He may wake a little afther daylight, and when he does give it to him."

"It's near daylight now."

"You're right, Kitty, so it is," said Mehaul, glancing around at the pale rays where they came through the little window. "I'll be off now, Kitty aroon; watch him well, an' if he wakens feverish all you have to do is not to let him tear off the bandages. I must be goin'. They'll be wondherin' at home where I am all night. Christmas Eve, too!"

"God bless you, Mehaul. I'll be behouldin' to you for ever. 'Twas God himself sent you this way last night."

"I'm glad I kem for poor Ned's sake. It's little I'd think ov goin' the wide length of Ireland to do him a sarvice. An' I wouldn't lave him now only for the mornin' that's in it."

"To be sure, Mehaul, why not? Everyone is wantin' in their own families. An' it's little I thought" (here the woman's tears burst forth again, and rolled down her wan cheeks) "last night that this is the Christmas mornin' *we'd* spend."

"Don't be cryin', Kitty; it's bad enough, but id might aisy be worse. An' between you and me, Kitty," said Mehaul, sinking his voice to a whisper, "I'm sore afeerd there'll be affliction enough in many a house that's pleasant

and happy this mornin' afore they light the fires or stir the greeshugh next Christmas Day."

With which solemn foreboding Mehaul knelt down beside Ned the Thrasher to listen to his breathing, and placed his hand on his heart to find out how its action was.

"He's aisier, Kitty. He's a powerful man, an' what wud kill another 'll pass off him athout much hurt; but sorra many thanks to the hand that done id. Good mornin'. I'll be round agin in the evenin'."

After this salutation, and with many heartfelt thanks for his succour and kindness from the forlorn woman, Mehaul stepped out into the bawn once more on his way home to Clohogue.

It will be noticed that in all the conversation that occurred between the two with respect to the wounded man no word of applying for redress to any quarter escaped either of them. The reason of this was not far to seek. The county Wexford, as well as the surrounding counties of Carlow and Wicklow, was at this time and for many months before it, over-run with armed forces—regular and irregular. The former were savage enough—regiments that had been withdrawn from service on the Continent—directed against a peaceful and unoffending people; but their atrocities paled before those of the irregular bands of yeomanry, to whom robbery and murder seemed the mere outcome of their cowardly nature. The former had some instinct of discipline to guide them; the latter none. Add, also, that the latter were imbued with a furious religious hatred, more in accord with the the principles of the Thugs in India than those of Christian people, and a fair idea may be presented of what the peasantry of these now harassed counties were suffering.

Murder and rapine stalked unreprovedly throughout the land. Burned houses, slaughtered inmates, terrified women and girls, were household stories in many parts. And if the flames of burning buildings made the night hideous, the suspended corpses from trees on the wayside made the day appalling.

For redress, there was none! The gentry and magistrates in many cases were themselves the leaders of these midnight murderers. Any pretence sufficed. A report of secret associations; the suspicion of concealed arms; the knowledge

that people were gathered to a wake, served to bring the raiding yeomen on this work of murder. Add to this, that the atrocious scoundrel who then ruled Ireland as Lord Lieutenant secretly connived at and encouraged these proceedings, and some faint idea can be formed of the condition of the distressed peasantry.

In some cases, however, where some gentleman of commanding influence at the Castle exerted himself in opposition to these proceedings, the neighbourhood suffered comparatively little; the murder and rapine, the burning homes, the fleeing from their houses at night—members or whole families hiding themselves where they might, lest the roofs should be burned over their heads before morning—were unknown. This was the case with Clohogue and its neighbourhood.

Thanks to the peaceful and humane tendencies of Colonel Victor, the resident landlord of the district, Clohogue suffered but little of the miseries endured elsewhere. From his tenantry, and indeed from the adjoining properties, the force of his strong character, and his well-known dislike to these ravagings of the people, made the midnight miscreants keep a wide berth.

Wherefore it was that this unlooked-for raid surprised Mehaul very much, just as the fact of the victim of it was Ned the Thresher afflicted him greatly.

"An' the first Christmas they are married, too!" thought Mehaul. "Where the dhoul did the sojers meet him, and what brought the murdherin' villians here (the curse ov God this mornin' light on 'em"—Mehaul took off his hat reverently as he gave forth this curse from the depth of his heart) "into this part ov the country and on such a night? Faix, Kitty needn't say a word, poor girl, that she has not a corpse for her husband to-night, or that the roof is not afire above her!"

Mehaul did not take the boreen that he had come by for his way home. Crossing from the bawn into the field of his recent researches, he proceeded at a rapid pace across a well-known short cut. The intensity of his thoughts, and the excitement of his feelings hastened his footsteps, so that he arrived at the stile leading, some half a mile distant, into the high road before he felt himself.

For the same reason he had probably been insensible to certain alarming sounds that, under less absorbing circumstances, his usually quick ear and clear eye would have noticed.

Wherefore it was that as he ascended the slippery wooden steps that led across the hedge, he for the first time heard the jingle of military accoutrements, and with sudden alarm saw that a patrol of soldiers were drawn up on the road directly facing him.

Without an instant's halt or hesitation, Mehaul leaped back from the step whereon he stood, falling as he did so, on the snow, his foot having slipped on the ice-covered step. The incident probably saved his life, for a volley was fired at him as he fell. He could see the red flash of the muskets, though he was not looking in their direction, and could hear the bullets whizz over him, and their quick thud as they struck against the ground some distance away, flinging up a shower of frozen snow.

Mehaul had sufficient presence of mind and coolness of nerve to know that the volley would be repeated, and that his safety—all chance of his life—lay in immediate flight, and before they could reload.

The report of the muskets had scarcely died out on the night air than it was succeeded by a peal of drunken laughter from the horsemen.

"That done for him, be the ——!" shouted one, choking with laughter.

"Knocked over; 'twas my shot did it!"

"No. By——, it was my musket tumbled him!" contradicted another.

"I'll back old Moll here to do the job," cried a third; "it never misses a croppy."

"He's off, be the Eternal!" shouted several voices, as Mehaul, leaping from the ground, flew downwards across the field in the direction of the swampy bush-covered space that lay beyond it. As he did so the ring home of the ramrods in the iron tubes came on his ears and the hoarse curses of the soldiers as they saw he was unhurt.

The field for which he was making was an unreclaimed one—unreclaimed because of the huge boulders of stone that lay over it, the outcome of the heavy granite formation

that cropped up beneath. Among and between the rocks grew tall whins, affording fair shelter for hiding in.

Mehaul knew every boulder and bush on it and winding path through it. Hundreds of times on moonlight nights and dark ones he had snared hares therein ; and now he strained every nerve and muscle to reach it. His heavy overcoat impeded his running ; but, even so, there was no time to throw it off. Every minute—nay, every second—was worth his life to him. With breathless lips he reached the hedge that bounded the field, and made directly for the stile, which he knew so well of old, that gave passage across it. His heart leaped into his mouth as he found it built up, and a stout and strong barricade of bushes and branches of trees piled across the top of it !

He cast a despairing glance around. To make a passage across it would, where every instant was so valuable, be out of the question. In his uncertainty he looked behind. Two of the soldiers, in their hot haste to overtake him, were leaping their horses across the road fence into the field in which he stood. In the moonlight he could see with his sharpened vision, the sheen of the silver light reflected on their drawn swords. In a very brief space they would be up with him.

A gate in the corner of the field, apparently built in substitution for the closed-up stile, met his eye. Thither he ran with all speed that fear and death can add to man's feet. Every second meant to him the difference between safety and deadly peril—between life and merciless hacking to death.

His feet slipped repeatedly on the frozen snow, but still he flew towards it. He laid his hands upon the topmost bar, and shook it to force it open. It was firmly barred !

Firmly barred ! and the tramp of the horsemen on the crispy snow close behind him.

He drew back a few steps, and again laying his hands on the top rail, vaulted across it. Under any other circumstances the feat would be impossible to him ; but life is very precious ; the life of a man in bounding health, and in possession of all his faculties, it is terrible to lose ; and no one knows what he can do, or what feat he can essay, until death is following at his heels. He cleared the gate just as he felt the breath of the panting horses on his neck.

There was a good distance yet to be passed over before he reached the desired haven. A good stretch of soft, reclaimed bog land. True, the shelter there could not be for long, for the rocky bush-covered ground was scarcely more than a couple of acres in extent. If he reached there, and they only waited long enough, they could yet search him out. But the morning light would soon come, and help in some shape might arrive. All these thoughts passed through his mind whilst yet he ran. But they might be summed up in one anxious desire—the one absorbing, burning, feverish hope to gain it.

How long it was! how slow his speeding steps seemed! How fast his thoughts ran compared with his lagging feet!

What!

The chill of death encompassed him as he heard shouts of laughter behind, and once more looking back, he saw that his pursuers had leaped or ridden over the gate, and were on his track, and rapidly nearing him. The same glance disclosed to him the presence of a dark body crossing the field he had just left, and which his quick thoughts assured him were portion of the same force riding after their comrades.

He continued his flight, however, for he had not stopped during the momentary look behind. To his horror and dismay he found his strength rapidly falling. His feet seemed heavy as lead, and the riders with gaining strides, were advancing after him.

Mehaul was very far from being, under ordinary circumstances, a cowardly man. Quite the contrary. But he well knew that if overtaken all that would remain for the Massgoers in the morning to see would be his bleeding body. There was no more hope or safety for him than there would be if the tireless tread of wolves and hungry tigers were after him.

He remembered the words of "Murrough-na-Gar." The advice of the spectral adviser on the mountain side occurred to him.

"Murrough-na-Gar!" he cried, running, "may God and the saints help me." And the same moment he placed his hand on the breast of his overcoat as if to still the beating of his panting heart.

In a second more he stopped, and with a cry that might be of safety, or surprise, or revenge, or of victory, turned suddenly round.

His hand had touched something hard and bulky, and the remembrance of the pistol for the first time flashed on his mind!

As he turned round, the foremost horseman was advancing rapidly towards him—but a few horses' lengths away, his drawn sword in hand. His companion was at some distance behind.

Mehaul had enough of knowledge of horses and of horsemen to know that the safest way to avoid the sword of the latter was to face directly the horse's head.

Instinctively, therefore,—for he had but time to draw the pistol—he clutched the horse's reins, just as a sharp blow from the sword cut the overcoat on his shoulder.

The horse reared up as he did so; and Mehaul now fully braced up to fight for his life, before the horse's forelegs again reached the ground, presented the pistol.

"Villian and murderer," he cried, "is this the work you're at this Christmas mornin'?"

Through the flash of the shot Mehaul could see the quick thud of the bullet on the soldier's breast. The reins fell from the rider's grasp, as the horse, startled by the flash under his eyes, leaped one side and bolted away.

His companion was coming at such a precipitate rate behind that he had no power, if he so willed, to draw up. But his horse, frightened at the uprearing of the other, swerved aside, and as it did Mehaul, quickly clutching the pistol by the barrel, flung it at the rider's head.

It was his only chance; but he relied on his aim. He had been too much accustomed to flinging hammers and tossing irons during his life to doubt its accuracy now. Nor need he. The butt-end of the pistol struck with tremendous force against the temple of the horseman, knocking him completely over. Scarcely waiting to see the result, he turned again, and was swiftly within the sheltering embrace of the Coillghorra.

He had not got far, creeping through the bushwood, when he found himself compelled to rest against the side of a rock. His heart was so beating with excitement and

the effects of his run for life, that he felt as if, with little more exertion, it would burst and pour out its life-current through his mouth. He felt himself suffocating, and could hardly draw his breath.

He could scarcely hear for the panting of his heart and his suffocating breathing. But when he was able to suppress these a little, the sound of angry voices came on his ear with great distinctness.

"Be the Lord Harry, he's dead. He's dead, I tell you!"

"Lift him up. Lift him up, and give him a breath of air. Off with his coat!"

"Help me with it, confound you. Why, it's all bloody. By ——, he's been shot right through the heart. Look!"

"This is a bad business, comrades."

"What's amiss with the captain?"

"Blast my eyes, if he's not dead, too!"

"It can't be. There was but one shot fired."

"No; his pulse beats."

"Where is the fellow gone?"

"Into the shrubbery."

"Shall we not follow him, sergeant?"

"Yes, yes; let us follow him," said several. "Let us cut the bloody life out of the Irish dog by inches."

"Ay, cut the life out of him, and tear his heart out before his eyes. Aye, damme me, let us do it, I say, and roast him alive after, on the furze!"

Mehaul listened with rapt attention whilst these blood-thirsty threats were being uttered in his hearing. That they were meant he knew well. There was no pretence whatever about them. Crushing himself against the wall in the shadow he listened on, every other feeling suspended in the intensity of his hearing.

"He can't get away. Let two or three ride round, and see that he does not escape at the other side."

"Ay, ay, two or three ride round, and we can search him out through the bushes. We shall soon have his d——d Irish soul howling in h——."

By the jingling of stirrups and accoutrements he could learn readily that the project was being put in force. He could hear the tread of the horses' feet as they pranced under their riders in the act of climbing into the saddles. And he

could further hear the rustling of the bushes, as some of the others began to work their way through.

A hundred expedients for escape passed through Mehaul's mind, as he listened. Would he run through the furze and try and make his escape at the other side? Impossible! The rustling of the whins would at once discover him, and the soldiers would quickly cut him off at the other side. Would he——

"Morrough-na-Gar! God and the saints protect me."

A command fell on his ears.

"Back! Halt, I say! Stay in your places!" It was the person addressed as sergeant he knew that spoke. "We cannot remain longer here. This is a bad business, as it is."

"Are we to let this bloody Irish thief escape?" asked a soldier gruffly.

"Take care of yourself," he heard the sergeant say in a significant manner. "There may be more bullets where this came from."

"So there might," said some of the others, in a tone of seriousness, that showed they had not appreciated this danger before. The reminder cooled down their valour a good deal; and all further conversation was carried on in whispers.

What the unheard discussion resolved itself into, however, he soon knew. When some arrangements had been effected he heard them moving off. They were evidently bearing the bodies of their comrades with them.

"Remember," said the sergeant, in a low warning voice, to the others, as they moved off, "we have been attacked by a band of hidden Croppies, who fired at us from their ambush. Stick to that, one and all."

A muttered assent, that seemed a compound of growls and curses, fell on Mehaul's ears. After some time, when complete silence had descended around him, he peeped out cautiously from his hiding place. He could see the group of horsemen passing up the field, the black forms standing out in strong relief against the white snow. He watched them until they had emerged into the high road, and until they had turned a corner thereof, and so became lost to view.

"It's the mercy ov God, if they don't turn down the boreen, an' set fire to the thatch, an' burn the roof over poor Ned," thought Mehaul. "An' be the powdhers o' war, so they will, if they see the cabin. The villains 'ud do anything this minit."

"I'll lave this here, anyway," said Mehaul, as he doffed the heavy overcoat, folded it up, and thrust it among the bushes.

Creeping cautiously out, he came on his hands and feet to the place where the encounter had taken place. The snow had been completely trampled off by the hooves of the horses.

"It isn't here," said he after a short and diligent search. "Bad scran to the villains, I wouldn't wish for the price ov a pair ov horseshoes, anyhow, they took it away. 'Twas the jewel ov a pistol—so it was."

The pistol was clearly gone; there was no use further looking for it. So, availing himself of the shelter of a ditch that run parallel to the road, he ran in a stooping position in the direction of Ned the Thresher's.

Arriving at the field bordering it, he saw to his great satisfaction that there was no sign of the soldiers in that direction; that the thatched roof was still intact; and that they had passed by without probably noticing it.

"Well, my brave North Cork!" said he, grimly apostrophising his late foes, "you've news goin' home you didn't expect, an' it's not clear to me we mayn't meet again! If we do—and that there's any kind ov a fair chance at all—well, may God strengthen my hand! that's all I say! Now, what way home?"

Bethinking himself that the more he deviated from his former route the better it would be for his future safety, he walked sharply across the fields from the house, at right angles to his former route, and having struck another road that formed one of the four roads at the Crosses, walked swiftly along it.

"I'm tired—that's what I am," said he when, after an hour's quick walking, he came in sight of the public-house. "'Twas a quare night wid me, God protect me. I'll turn in an' take somethin' to drink. I'm mortal tired and weary."

Instead, however, of walking to the front door and attracting attention from any passers by on their way to Mass,

he deflected to the left, and entered the orchard by the opposite side from that Traveller No 2 had entered in the earlier portion of the night.

"It's in the back room he'll be sleepin', I'm thinkin'," said he, as he advanced to the back of the house, and tapped at the window.

"Who's there?" said the voice of the sleeper within, quickly waking at the noise.

"It's me, Watt. It's Mehaul-na-Corriga; lift the windy a bit, an' let me in."

The window was quickly lifted and Mehaul entered.

"Is it only now you come back?" asked the sleeper, as he lazily proceeded to dress himself.

"Faix it is. Light the candle, an' shut the shutters."

"What's amiss, Mehaul?" inquired the former, impressed at the words. "What delayed you?"

"What was nearly delayin' me for ever."

"Delayin' you for ever!"

"Just that. But get me somethin' to dhrink. I am nearly ready to faint with tiredness."

"Certainly; to be sure," said the young man, moving towards the door.

"Stay a minint, Watt. Don't say who is here. It's just as well not."

"Just as you like. Though I see no reason for it."

"Don't mind that. Do as I bid you."

In a few minutes the youth returned, with a pewter measure of brandy.

Mehaul drank off a tumbler-full greedily, and then filled another, into which he also dipped pretty deeply, his companion watching him with strange interest.

"Thank God for that! It's the savin' of my life," said the refreshed smith.

"You are wearied with walking."

"I'm wearied with runnin'" said the smith significantly.

"With runnin'!"

"Divil a more or less, Watt. Do you miss anything off me?"

"No, I do not."

"Think."

"No, I don't remember."

"Your coat?"

"Oh, yes, I remember? You left it behind. It was too heavy for walking in, I daresay."

"It was heavy enough, surely; but it was useful for all that. Do you remember your pistol?"

"Oh! by the way, yes; to be sure."

"Well, Watt, the bullet that was in it is not in it now," said the smith in a whisper.

"Not in it! You perplex me. Where is it?"

"In a man's heart—in a dead man's breast; stone dead."

"Stone dead!"

"Ay, a sojer. Sit down and I'll tell you. Close the doore, an' bolt it."

The fire had not died out on the hearth, and towards it the two men drew their chairs. And there in whispered words, Mehaul told his young friend the story of his encounter with the North Cork; told him further of the wounding of Ned the Thresher; to all of which Walter listened without speaking word and in the most intense surprise.

"I had no idea," said he slowly, as the other concluded his hurried and whispered narration, "that the country was in such an awful state."

"It's worse in other places, as you'll soon learn. It's only the beginnin' iv id here, I'm sore afraid."

"I returned in an evil time, I see," said the traveller pondering.

"You might sware that on the Mass-book," said the smith solemnly. "An' now maybe, for your own sake, I may as well tell you somethin' it's well for you to know. Id consarns yourself."

"Consarns me?"

"Sartinly it does; an' you'll soon see why."

Whereupon the smith plunged at once head-foremost into a further story, to which, in its interest for the traveller, the first story paled completely.

"Well, Mehaul," said he slowly, "you surprise me. The man must be an atrocious villain."

"He's all that."

"But surely you don't—nobody does—believe it."

"I don't, nor many others. For that again, there are many others that do."

"Many others that do!"

"Not of the neighbours, though; but I'm afraid of the quality around, all do."

"And, merciful Providence, has this evil stigma attached to my name all these years that I have been away—that I have been winning fame and honours elsewhere?"

The smith was silent.

"Did I come back to find myself classed as a murderer—at the uncontradicted word of a nameless scoundrel? I'll search the villain out before another day, and make him eat his words. I will, so help me——."

"You'll do nothin' ov the kind, Watt. Nor would I tell you about id now but that the sooner you're made acquainted with the report the betther for yourself."

"What do you mean?" asked Watt in some surprise.

"Don't be angry wid me whin I tell you," said the smith, laying his hand on the other's knee in a most impressive manner, "what I'm going to tell you. An' what I'm going to tell you is this—the shorter you stay in this house or hereabouts, the betther for your safety."

"He would not dare to——."

"I don't know what he would or he wouldn't; but I'd recommend you—if you don't want to see yourself in Wexford Jail, or, more likely, swingin' from the tree outside, or wan on the way—afore the clock strikes twelve o'clock to-night—to put as far as you can between yourself and the Crosses. That's my advice."

"That's your advice?"

"That's my advice, Watt, I say id agin. Not to spake of id bein' *your* coat I wore—though as no one saw you, that don't make much matter; nor av the pistol they found bein' yours."

"The pistol! By Jove, I had forgotten; that pistol is not mine—at least, I only owned it for this one day."

"Sorra may care. It's not a pistol wan about here was likely to have; so, agin I say, take my advice, an' get off. 'Torney Gordon 'll have the sojers here afore the Christmas night closes, mark my words."

"Then I'd betther tell mother and sister. I certainly did not pass through the dangers of a dozen battlefields to die at the hands of a few cowardly militiamen in this lawless land."

"Do. Talk to 'em about id. I'll be bound they'll be on the wan side wid me. An' now, as the light is far advanced, I'll be goin' home. Here's your health, an', be the powdhers ov war, Watt," said he, shaking Traveller No. 2 by the hand with intense warmth, "I'm sorry your comin' was not in happier times. An' faix, I'm sore afeered they're only commencin'."

Buttoning his working jacket more closely about him, the smith once more emerged into the orchard, crossed therefrom into the public road, and took his way homeward.

Arriving here, and with some explanation to his wife as to his non-appearance during the night, Mehaul threw himself on his bed, and in a few minutes was fast asleep.

Not in a dreamless sleep, however, for red-coated soldiers, gleaming swords, and wounded men, danced in endless succession through his dreaming brain, until his wife roused him with the intimation that it was time to prepare for twelve o'clock Mass.

CHAPTER X.

GRACE COTTRELL'S DREAM.

When Grace Cottrell returned to her bed-room after having sent the brandy to Murrough, she knelt at a chair by the fire for some time to say her prayers. As she passed the beads mechanically through her fingers, her thoughts ran back from her prayers to a memorable Christmas night, exactly four years before, when the greatest sorrow of her life darkened her threshold and still threw its shadow over her heart.

For it was on that night her brother's life was lost in the dark waters of the Slaney. Lost, too—and that fact added an additional poignancy to the sorrow that overwhelmed her—by the hand of one who had been his constant companion during his life-time, and who had been on still more intimate and tender relations with herself.

What quarrel had come between them—what had caused friend's hand to be raised against friend's hand—remained these four long years a mystery—a mystery which would probably never be cleared up. Her brother's body had never been found; the rushing waters of the Slaney had borne it out to sea; and his assailant had disappeared on that Christmas night—whither no one ever knew. He had never since turned up. But one man—brought to the river's bank by some mysterious decree, to be witness to the deed—was able to give some account of it; though, indeed, for some time a rather confused and contradictory account, until his recovered memory enabled him to settle his information into an ordered and intelligible shape. That man was 'Torney Gordon.

The thought's and memories that ran through Grace's abstracted attention were in this wise—

Dick Cottrell—otherwise Dick-na-Raheen—so named from the rath that lay near the house, was, at the time of the occurrence, a young fellow of eighteen or thereabouts, just one year younger than his sister Grace. Born to good means and possessions more than usually the lot of farmers, he was the idol of his mother and sister. Frank, pleasant, good-looking, and good-humoured, he was the light of the house, and the most popular youth in the neighbourhood. He was, however, what is known in the country districts as "a little wild."

These words had but little in character with the same words as applied to city youth. It meant nothing of vice or dissipation. It meant, however, plenty of poaching on the landlord's preserves, midnight fishing for salmon on the close fisheries of the Slaney, a fondness for attending dances and such like; so that, from the time he grew to be sixteen years of age, very seldom any portion of the night, except the dawn, saw Dick in his bed. The mother's fondness for him overlooked these habits; and as the youth was, from his position, independent of the necessity of working, and as, moreover, he always was ready to entertain his mother with a droll story of some incident that had happened to him, his "wildness" was condoned; and save a little advice, occasionally, which Dick managed to let in on one ear and out on the other, he was free to follow his pursuits with dog and

gun. In consequence of these active and hardy pursuits, he grew with his years into strength and health unusual; was the best wrestler, hurler, and football player, in the country round; could put his hand on the back of a horse and vault over three placed side by side; could knock a bird perched on the top branch of the highest tree into a falling mass of feathers, or, if needed, cut the bough on which it rested in two with a bullet; whilst the flush of abounding health and exercise showed itself in the well-developed frame, in the high colour of his cheek, and in the clear blue of his good-humoured eye.

He had one constant companion, and occasional rival, in these pursuits, and that one was Walter Malone, otherwise and more popularly known as Watt of the Crosses. This latter was somewhat older, perhaps, by two or three years; and it was with very great truth suspected that it was the influence of Watt of the Crosses that had led his younger companion into his fondness for these nocturnal habits.

From his very earliest years Watt of the Crosses had manifested an uncontrollable tendency for hunting, and fishing and fowling. They came perfectly natural to him. Were there a salmon of unusual size in the Slaney, almost before it had flicked the salt water from its fins, Walter knew in what pool it was located, and how it could be most readily gaffed. Did a really fat, brown-gray hare in some (for itself) unfortunate moment, leave the heath of the Blackstairs for some lowland abode, it was scarcely warm in its seat, before, by some curious instinct, he knew of it.

Night and day seemed all the same to him; and if he could not see to shoot, his aim with a short heavy stick, perfectly adapted for the purpose, was so true, that he could with a deft "pelt," break the hind legs of a hare as she ran, or, striking her on the head, tumble her heels over, stone dead.

If a light were visible at night on the banks of the Slaney no one had occasion to fear that it was a Will-o'-the-Wisp, whose gleam flickered thereon.

"That's Watt o' the Crosses, I'll be bound," was the comment of the watcher.

And, nine cases out of ten, the remark was correct. Watt with some follower as fond of the fun and frolic, and the

illegality—for in that, I regret to say, lay the chief attraction—was sure to be in the neighbourhood. The *modus operandi* was simple. A sheaf of wheaten straw dried to perfection, a tin of live coal, with ashes strewn above it to keep the embers alive, and a long spear or gaff, as it was familiarly termed, were all that was necessary.

Arrived at the pool where the salmon lay at rest sleeping—if ever fish do sleep—the ashes were thrown off, the turf embers lighted by blowing thereon with the mouth; and, as the blaze of the burning sheaf threw its illumination over the water, the salmon could be perceived at its very depths turning its white breast up to the red glare. A deft hand, uplifting the gaff with unerring aim, plunged it into the side or breast of the coveted fish—and the work was done. The sheaf went out, hissing in the startled waters, and the poachers were in midnight darkness.

If any of our readers have ever thus broken the laws of the realm, it is to be hoped that they have, like ourselves, many a time atoned for it by wet feet and wetter clothes.

The lapse of a few years in school in Dublin brought Watt o' the Crosses back with greater ardour than ever for his unwillingly intermitted practices. And it was at this time he commenced his tuition of young Dick-na-Raheen.

Late and early they were together; and if Dick failed to be at the Crosses, Watt was sure to be at the Rath. Indeed, the latter was more frequently the case than the former.

For, apart from his inordinate love of poaching, there was another, and almost (I say *almost* advisedly) a greater attraction for him there. And this attraction consisted in none other than her very self, who thus passed her beads abstractedly through her fingers, but with no accompanying prayers passing in her mind.

I think I have described Grace already. But her fair face—beautiful and radiant, as it was with the light of the firelight playing on it—was far different now from what it was before the shadow of this trouble and unexpected horror fell on it.

Now, her face was pale and tinged with sadness: then, it beamed with pleasure and delight and happiness, as one that had never known a moment of sorrow. The roses had faded from her cheeks, and the laughing light from her eyes; and

though still very beautiful—with a mantle of purity and innocence over the rounded contour of her face—there was much of the merry brightness of former days gone from it.

This was the attraction that brought Watt so often to the Rath. And if her bright smile and blue eye possessed attraction for him, it is but fair to say that his handsome face, manly form, and rollicking way found equal favour with her. Not that she would admit that to him. Quite the contrary. Grace pouted her pretty lips, and made every endeavour to frown angrily, whenever anyone joked with her on the subject. However, although no love passages had ever taken place between them, there was—call it magnetic attraction, oddic force, or what you will—a clearly established understanding that Grace thought as much of him as Watt most undoubtedly did about his young companion's charming sister.

"Where is Dick, Grace?" Watt would say, entering the house on a summer's day with his fishing tackle in his hand, or his gun on his arm, his dogs behind him.

"Where he should be," Grace would answer with pretended haughtiness—"and where you, too, ought to be—minding his business."

"Bless my soul, Grace! He is getting very sensible."

"So he is, but he need not thank you for that."

"Need not he, though? Who gives him good advice but myself, I should like to know?"

"If you have any good advice I think you ought to keep it for yourself. I don't think you have much to spare."

"Who told *you* that?"

"Everybody."

"Well, 'everybody' has little to do, making remarks on his neighbours. Where is Dick?"

"Didn't I tell you already? Minding his business."

"The Lord preserve us! You'll soon make an old man of him."

"Well, it is better be that than a wild young one."

"Is it?"

"It is."

"You're a good judge, I suppose?"

"I am."

"Well, maybe I'd show you to the differ."

As Watt had been, during this bit of fencing, gradually, but slowly advancing, whilst Grace kept a furtive glance behind her for the purpose of retreat, the repartee was heightened in interest between the pair by these movements.

"I'd like to see you showing me to the differ."

"Would you?"

"Yes, I would. It would be like your impudence."

"It would—would it? Let me see if it would."

Which expression of intention to inquire into that singular problem was generally followed by a sudden rush of Watt to catch her, for the expressed purpose of showing her to the differ.

But Grace, in no way disposed for that amount of instruction, was quick to turn on her heel on the moment, and with foot fleeter than fairie, fly with a laughing scream into the house or up into the parlour. Whereupon, missing his object, Watt abandoned the chase; and when next Grace looked out from her hiding-place, it was to see her brother Dick and Watt o' the Crosses betaking themselves to the heath-clad hills in the far distance, or the silvery windings of the Slaney —gun or rod in hand.

We may as well make a clean breast of it, and say that it was the pleasant reminiscences of these happy days—now dead and buried in the vanished passed—that flitted through Grace's mind instead of her prayers.

Waking, however, to a sense of the sin of abstraction, which she was committing, and feeling it hopeless for the present to bend the current of her wandering thoughts on her devotions, she blessed herself, placed the beads under her pillow, and before retiring, walked over to the window to have a look over at the moonlight on the snow.

The frost had crusted on the inside of the glass, and she rubbed off the thin icy covering with her handkerchief.

The snow lay outside, burnished by the silver light of the moon. Tree, and bush, and hedge were white all over, as if they had been suddenly changed into fanciful likenesses, in snow, of the originals. But where they interposed between the moon's rays and the snow-covered ground the shadows they threw were black indeed. Unusually so, because of the extreme whiteness of all around.

The contrast was of itself sufficient to attract Grace's abstracted attention.

Suddenly, however, her attention was attracted in a very forcible manner. It seemed to her there was some object moving within the shadow of the hedge—a something that was darker than the shadow itself, crouching therein.

Grace's eyes were arrested to the spot. With her left hand raised in alarm, and with the forefinger of her right on her lips, she stood for a moment or two the very figure of startled surprise.

Why she was so startled it would have been difficult for her to explain; for in the number of attendants about the house, there was nothing singular in any one of them being around or about. But so it was—perhaps of the crouching, undistinguishable, form of the object—that she was very much and unusually surprised.

The silence that followed her arrested attention, developed new movements on the part of the crouching form, which had been apparently stayed by the noise her rubbing on the window-pane had caused.

It emerged from the darkness of the shadow into the clear light of the moon; and, as it did, a cry rose to Grace's lips. But in her astonishment it died there, and she stood as one paralysed, devoid of power or motion.

"Surely she knew that hiding form! Oh! merciful Heaven! Could the dead, then, rise from its grave and re-appear? Could the——"

The incoherent thought arising in her mind lapsed into frameless oblivion, as the figure, gliding over the snow, seemed to approach the window; but quickly glided back into its retreat, as if startled by some noise unheard by her ears!

Still, Grace, wholly unconscious of her existence or position, watched spell-bound. For a few minutes, which seemed to her hours, it remained in shadow. Then, as if the noise that frightened it had passed away, it again emerged from its hiding place, looked carefully round, advanced a step, stood still, then glided once more towards the window, and laid its extended hands on the window-sill, and looked upward.

"Surely!—oh, merciful heavens!"—The long pent-up cry arose from her lips, as the white face, unearthly-looking

in its weird paleness, looked up to where she stood unseen; her head reeled with a paroxysm of untold terror, and she felt herself in danger of swooning.

Controlling herself with a powerful effort, she flew to the door, opened it, raced with almost sightless eyes through the dark passage that led to the kitchen, and entered the latter just at the moment when 'Torney Gordon was about seating himself at the glowing fire.

"Murrough! Murrough!" she screamed, as she flung the door wide open.

"What is it, Grace? What's amiss?" said Murrough leaping up and rushing forward to his young mistress's aid at her cry.

He caught her in his arms as she was about falling.

All rose in rapid confusion, among them 'Torney Gordon, and crowded around her.

"What is amiss, Miss Cottrell? I am sorry to see you so alarmed," said the latter, preparing to place his arms around her to support her, assuming it, from the relation that existed between them, to be his proper duty.

His voice fell on the fainting girl's ears; and probably the start they gave her counterbalanced what she had already sustained and neutralised it, for she immediately recovered her presence of mind, and released herself from the support of each.

"You look frightened, Miss Cottrell. Has anything alarmed you?"

As he asked the question, the alarm which he had received at the forge of Clohogue recurred with a strange feeling to himself.

"I have been ill—very ill," said Grace faintly.

"You're looking very white, Miss Grace," said Murrough gently. In presence of the attorney, he found himself compelled to drop the more familiar manner in which they were all accustomed to address her.

"Yes, I got a—a weakness," said Grace evasively; "but I'm better now. When did you come, Mr. Gordon?"

"I suppose you are surprised to see me here at this hour of a Christmas morning?"

"When did you come?" asked Grace, declining to answer his question—which would have been strongly in the affirmative, if she had.

"A few minutes ago, I was passing by, and the roads being difficult to travel in consequence of the ice, I thought we should wait until the morning light enables us to continue."

"You are very welcome," said Grace, gently; "it was very kind of you to call. We must see about——"

"Nay, nay, Miss Cottrell, you must take no trouble about us. We shall rest here very comfortably until the morning."

"Oh, no; you must be tired, and the girls will provide you with beds."

"Many thanks, dear Miss Cottrell, but we shall not trespass on your hospitality further than to enjoy this pleasant fire."

"I am sorry you would not rest yourself," said Grace, whose colour (in the new object of interest) had returned into her beautiful face.

"No, Miss Grace, you must excuse me for the time——"

"At any rate, you must take some refreshments," said Grace, insistingly, "if only to drink my health on Christmas morning."

"I shall have extreme pleasure," assented Mr. Gordon, "but only on the condition—that you will not suffer yourself to be disturbed by my presence here, and that you will take your rest—until I am leaving at any rate."

"It is so inhospitable to——"

"I am very comfortable, I assure you. The inhospitality would consist in putting yourself about in your present delicate condition. Take my advice, dear Miss Cottrell, and take your sleep."

"You will wait to breakfast with us," asked Grace, gratified by his kindness and consideration for her.

"Yes, certainly, with the greatest of pleasure."

"Thanks, come with me, Nisthaus, and you, Maureen, and bring some refreshments to Mr. Gordon. Good night," said she, extending her hand to him with a pleasant smile, "or rather good morning," with which farewell she left him, and departed with her two servant maids to her room, where she sought to win sleep to her eyelids.

That task of wooing sleep is often a distressing and unsatisfactory one. It was particularly distressing to her whose mind had been so completely overthrown by the incidents of the past two hours. At the same time, however, to prevent the terrifying thoughts that these incidents called up from

resting on her mind too much, she listened to the conversation of the two girls as they talked in low sentences at the fire.

Finally, she fell asleep.

Only to dream, however, of distressing things—of rushing waters and drowning men, of burning houses and strange appearances ; until after a time her distressing thoughts settle into definite shape and pursued an existence of their own in more or less intelligibleness and consistency.

She was travelling on a journey, whither or why, it did not occur to her dreaming brain to ask. But it was through a wholly unknown country, with dangers and difficulties abounding therein. Rushing streams crossed by shaky bridges, difficult hills by winding sheep paths, thorny ravines with no paths at all. But nowhere did there seem to be stop or stay in her painful travelling, nowhere objective point ; it was one ceaseless and continuous, but apparently objectless journey. A strange light gleamed over her, guiding her on her way, which she knew was not that of the sun, nor of the moon, but which, whilst affording sufficient light to travel by, added strangely to the weariness of the journey.

Suddenly she found herself crossing a narrow bridge, whose frail planking passed over a deep and gloomy torrent far beneath. Midway she felt a hand clasping her dress, seeking to draw her into the lightless abyss. At the same time she felt a hand grasping her by the shoulder, and trying also to urge her over the low railing, to which, in her terror, she convulsively clung.

A glance downwards made the blood rush back into her heart, and the sight leap in terror from her eyes ! For the face that met her gaze was that of her dead brother, lost years ago in the Slaney. The face was pale, but otherwise unaltered—there was no sign of anger or of recognition impressed thereon, but still she felt the powerful grasp on her dress, seeking to pull her down. She tried to scream, but could not. Her lips seemed spell-bound !

She turned to the form behind her. Another surprise almost greater than the first met her there. The form seeking with giant force to hurl her over—partly prevented therefrom by the downward force of her brother's efforts and

her own deathlike hold of the rails—was her quandom lover, and her brother's murderer—Watt o' the Crosses!

Still, no affrighted cry came from her. The action of her heart was suspended, and her lips and throat refused to perform their office. With the desperation of horror and impending death, she clung, with iron grasp, to the railings.

At that moment the friendly light that had guided her almost ceased. The air was growing dark with its waning. Strange figures floated before her eyes; strange noises sounded in her ears; but at the moment a friendly hand was laid upon hers, and looking up she saw the face of her accepted lover, Mr. Birchwood Gordon.

The presence of a protecting arm, the sense that friends and succour were near, released the bands of death that held her senses paralysed, and a cry of joy that made the trembling bridge, deep ravine, and lonely river echo with its wildness, burst from her lips.

"Grace, honey; Grace, avourneen!" said the watching Nisthaus, bending over her, as her own cry awoke her, "what is amiss wid you?"

"Oh, is that you, Nisthaus?" said the terrified girl, not yet able to collect her scattered senses, and scarcely fully aware whether her late terrors were real or fanciful.

"It's me, Grace; to be sure it is. Who else would it be? What's amiss wid you, achorra?"

It may be remarked that though Nisthaus and Maureen were but little older than Grace herself, they were usually in the habit of addressing her by these endearing terms—perhaps a custom that had grown up during the time she was a little girl.

"Nothing," said Grace, glancing around the room with frightened eyes, "only I've had a dreadful dream."

"Arrah-yea!" said Nisthaus cheerfully, "don't mind thim dhrames; sure everybody knows they're only nonsense."

"Mine was a frightful one," said Grace, still but little assured by the presence of her servant. "I was dreadfully alarmed. What time is it?"

"It's nigh ten o'clock. The people are long past by, going from eight o'clock Mass in Boolavogue."

"Oh, why did you not call me earlier?" asked Grace, in wonderment that she had slept so long.

"I'd be very sorry to call you earlier," said Nisthaus, "an' you after goin' to bed so late, or rather so airly this mornin'."

"Did you get no sleep yourself?"

"What would I want ov id?" asked the girl evasively, for she did not want to worry her good-natured young mistress by any reflection of the kind. "Haven't I the whole day after Mass to rest myself?"

"I wouldn't have slept so long if I had known you were sitting up all night."

"Nor I wouldn't let you if I knew 'twas dhramin quare dhrames you wor. The fright is in your eyes still. What wor you dhramin' about? That the snow was over the roof ov the house, I'll engage, and that we couldn't go to Mass?"

"'Twas not that, Nisthaus. I was dreaming of strange lights and journeyings; and, God bless us! of dead friends, that——"

"Faix an' your dhrame is out, Miss Grace," said Nisthaus solemnly.

"My dream is out;" almost shrieked Grace, as she suspended the action of her hands in dressing herself. "What do you mean, Nisthaus? What happened? I see by your face something has happened."

"An' there has, Grace, aroon machree," said Nisthaus, whose cheerful face suddenly lost much of its brightness, and grew rapidly as pale as her mistress's.

"What is it? Why don't you tell me, Nisthaus?" asked Grace, tremblingly. "Nothing has happened Mr. Gordon, I hope!"

"Oh, sorra haporth," said Nisthaus forgettingly, in a tone that seemed to imply it made very little matter even if there did.

"What else? Why don't you speak, Nisthaus?"

"Sure it's spakin' about id everyone is in the whole parish. Not a word else anyone had to say goin' or comin' from the chapel this mornin'. An' why not? It's hard enough to have the cowld an' the hardship about 'em, not to talk ov havin' the roof burnt over their heads."

"Over whose heads?" asked Grace, now for the first time getting an inkling of how matters stood.

"Everyone's."

"Everyone's?"

"Yes, Grace, aroon, everyone that was near the high road along the Slaney."

"Who burned them?" asked Grace in affright reverting again to her dream, and wondering whether she had been really asleep or had seen the burning.

"The yeomen an' the sojers, Grace, honey—the North Corks."

"My God!"

"Ay, achone, that's the news the crathurs have this Christmas mornin', the Lord look down on 'em an' protect 'em."

"What brought the troops this way?"

"Sorra know anyone knows. They wor ridin along when they wor attacked, an' some ov 'em wor kilt; an' so the burnt the houses an' they going back, an' shot the crathurs!"

"This is awful news, Nisthaus," said Grace, in great distress. "I thought we would be saved from these horrors in this part of the county."

"It's thinkin' the people are that we're only in the beginning ov id, and that worse is to come. But Mr. Gordon is waitin' breakfast for you."

Grace needed but this reminder to resume her toilet, and as soon as it was over she hastened to the parlour, where that gentleman and her mother were awaiting her.

CHAPTER XI.

GRACE'S ENGAGEMENT

"You slept very late, Grace," said her mother, as she entered.

"It was far in the night when I went to bed; but," said Grace, turning to Mr. Gordon, with a face half of welcome and half of distress, "isn't this awful news, Mr. Gordon. I hope it is not true."

"I fear that it is, Miss Cottrell; but I have only heard the rumours."

"I was hoping we might be spared this, as we have escaped it so long," said Grace, seriously, as she took her seat at the breakfast table. "What could have brought the soldiers out last night?"

"I don't know; it would be difficult to say; but I know rumours were afloat that some strange parties were coming among the people with no good intention. The soldiers were probably looking after these; but they were attacked last night by bodies of armed men, and the rumour has it, I don't know with what truth, that some of them have been killed or wounded."

This statement was a guess on the part of the attorney, deduced from the night's experience, and made with the view to certain contingencies; but he was surprised, nevertheless, to see how visibly it affected the young girl.

"Strangers!" said she. "Who could they be, and what purpose have they?"

"I don't know, Miss Cottrell; but probably the authorities, who are better informed, do; and so have prepared measures accordingly."

"It would be frightful," said Grace, "if the disturbances in other parts were re-enacted here."

"If the people are wise—and I sincerely trust for their own sake they are—they will avoid it."

"Avoid it," said Grace, "how?"

"Why, by refusing shelter or assistance to these designing disturbers. Otherwise, no one can say what may happen. In all likelihood the innocent will suffer with the guilty—suffer

for them, I should have said—for that is what most frequently happens."

"Oh, Mr. Gordon, could you not advise them?" said Grace, in great distress. "And could you not use your influence, your great influence, with the authorities to keep the yeomen and the soldiers away?"

"Why, my dear Miss Cottrell, no influence can sway them so long as the people tolerate strange and suspicious characters breeding disloyalty and trouble in the neighbourhood. It rests, as you see, entirely with the people."

"And that puts me in mind, Grace," said her mother, who probably dreaded to see the comfort around her disturbed by these strange occurrences that were afflicting other parts of the land, "that we ought to be telling you what Mr. Gordon and myself have been talking about."

Indeed, as she glanced around, it was no wonder that she should be afraid to see the pleasant circumstances around her disturbed. The parlour was a pleasant, comfortable one, the furniture massive and heavy, and as the kettle hissed before the fire, and the ham and bacon smoked on the table, anyone, much less a woman who had gone through much sorrow in her lifetime, would be startled to think of these quiet home scenes being disturbed by raiding soldiers or rebellious insurgents.

"What is that mother?" asked Grace, unsuspectingly.

"Why, it's so long, Grace, honey, since this match was talked of an' fixed upon, that we were saying why it might as well take place now as at any other time. After Christmas."

"Oh, mother," said Grace, suddenly taken aback and embarrassed, "it was not to take place until *next* Summer. Mr. Gordon himself so arranged it."

"But the times are growing so strange and troublesome, Grace dear, you know," said the old woman, glancing at Mr. Gordon, "and we have no mankind in the place to look after and protect it for us."

"I don't see any reason in that for hurry, mother, dear," said Grace, quietly. "We have done no one any harm. Why should anyone molest us? And, besides, Mr. Gordon's name is enough to protect us."

"Mr. Gordon does not think so, Grace," said the old woman. "We have been talking over it before you came in."

"If Miss Cottrell does not object, I should certainly prefer it as soon as possible," said Mr. Gordon deferentially. "The country is becoming disturbed—*is* disturbed in many places. And may be so here, too, before long. Last night's work gives certain indication of it. And if it does, any man's bare word or authority would be of little use in extending protection to others, however powerful he might be in protecting his own household."

"Just what we have been saying, Grace," said the old woman. "When it has been fixed on what is the use of delaying it?"

"But, mother," said Grace, not yet recovered from the suddenness with which this proposition met her, "I have had so little time to think of it. It has only been mentioned now. Give me a little time to think over it. My health has been very delicate of late," said Grace, casting about in her embarrassment, for some excuse for delay.

And here it may be mentioned, what probably the reader has inferred before, that Mr. Gordon was Grace's accepted husband. For some years before, when he was not at all in very prosperous circumstances, as he now was, the beauty of the young girl had struck him, and he had, after his manner, loved her.

Grace had then known of his advances only to feel annoyance at them, in which feeling she was joined and supported by her brother, who could scarcely bear the attorney as a visitor at Knockraheen, where the fact of his having the fishery control of the river not unfrequently proved the ostensible occasion of his presence.

The very idea of Mr. Gordon at all thinking of his sister gave the youth, whose pride of family and pride in his handsome sister's beauty was very strong, insupportable annoyance. That a foundling—one without father or mother—picked out of the gutters, as the country people phrased it, should, no matter what his prospects or abilities were, take thought of aspiring to his family, the oldest and most respectable of the farming classes in the place, was a matter of dire offence to him. Nor was the feeling in any way lessened by the instinctive knowledge that his intimate, rollicking,

handsome, and popular companion, Watt o' the Crosses, liked and loved her.

But with the melancholy fate of her brother, and the necessary disappearance from the law of his friend, other feelings came over the little family group of two. They were alone and unprotected. Mr. Birchwood Gordon grew daily in business, and wealth, and esteem; he was welcomed at the houses of the best, and was entrusted with their confidence; and the wonder was, not that he should find favour where he was formerly rejected, but that he should continue to prefer his addresses at all. But Mr. Gordon, as we have said, was struck years before with the girl's handsomeness, and the few years that elapsed, bringing her to the age of twenty-three, had only added riper and more interesting traits to her beauty.

The old laughing, pleasant manners, with, perhaps, a tinge of raillery and joyous mocking in them, were gone; and were succeeded by a quiet, sensible sedateness, which, with the impress of sorrow her features retained, but made her the more beautiful and interesting in his eyes. Moreover, though her family had never aspired to the rank of gentility, they always stood forward as foremost among the farming classes of Wexford, and bore a name that stood second to none for worth and respectability—one, indeed, that many higher than themselves would be glad to be allied with. Moreover, also, the farm of Knockraheen and its appurtenances were by no means to be despised. All considerations worthy of attention by a shrewd man of the world. But, indeed, the questions that swayed Birchwood Gordon's mind, were the young girl herself, her exceeding beauty and her graceful and winsome address and appearance.

As to Grace, she became so accustomed to seeing him at the house, as a visitor, and he had shown himself so kind and compassionate in the sorrowful days after her brother's death, that she had come to recognise him as almost one of the household. So by degrees, and urged thereto by the advice of her mother and friends, she had also come to think favourably of him for a husband. Wherefore, it came to pass that without any love whatever on her part, he had proposed for her, and she had accepted him some months

before, on the understanding that the marriage—an understanding mainly arising from himself—should not take place for another year.

Whatever other feelings of love, whatever other beautiful dreams, had filled her heart in days gone by, had been rudely quenched out that sorrowful Christmas night. At times, indeed, when the bright sun beamed over the sparkling river, recalling thoughts of the past, she cried bitter tears over those vanished times, and for the bright fulfilment thereof that might have been, but was not; but even this Grace at last sternly quenched from her mind. It was little less than a sin, Grace thought, to allow even a reminiscence of the past to possess her heart, and so she henceforward excluded them before the thoughts were well formed in her mind. Not until this Christmas morn, when they obtruded themselves on her dreaming brain, did she recall them.

It was, however, with a feeling of some surprise that she heard from her mother's lips that the date had been fixed for a nearer period.

"I don't see, Grace, what's the use in delaying it longer than a week or two, anyway. You will have time enough to make preparations. And what preparations have you to make? You are not going to leave your own house."

"I know that, mother, but——"

"Now, Grace, be reasonable; don't you see the way things are around here? Don't you know the way they are elsewhere through the county? and isn't it right and fitting that we should have some one here at the head of the house to protect us? Not all as one as if it belonged to nobody. Don't you think so, Mr. Gordon?"

"I don't like to press Miss Cottrell," said Mr. Gordon, "but if she will permit me, I should beg to remind her that it was I who fixed the date at first so far in the future. I did not then anticipate the troubles that are now arising, and the necessity for having so beautiful and attractive a girl—I have no wish to flatter, and do not mean my words in that light—left unprotected, when bands of reckless soldiery may be moving at will over the country. That is my reason for wishing it even sooner than you mention."

"Do you hear that, Grace?" asked Mrs. Cottrell, appealing to her daughter. "Can anything be more reasonable?"

Nothing could, if the ceremony were to take place at all. No reasonable apology for its delay could be urged. For reasons, indeed, the sooner the better.

Grace was forced to think so, and to admit as much, so that before they got up from the breakfast table the necessary consent from her was obtained, and the day fixed, some three weeks in the future. Mr. Gordon's professional business in Dublin would necessitate his absence for a few weeks; but that once concluded, his presence at Knock-Raheen would be continuous, and the ceremony could be performed.

With which understanding the little group at the breakfast table broke up, Grace and her mother to prepare for eleven o'clock mass at Boulavogue, and Mr. Gordon to continue the journey that was so unpleasantly interrupted the night before.

Although Grace had long been possessed of the knowledge that sooner or later the marriage should take place, the fixing of it for so early a date more or less disturbed and agitated her. Coming so soon after the singular dream she had had, it seemed to her at times as if it were the fortuitous revealment of the dream, and that he was come as her protector. When this view of the case presented itself, and she thought further of the alarming news around, she considered herself fortunate, in that her future was soon to be finally fixed and determined.

At other times, however, tender reminiscences sprang up in her heart, prompting the tears into her eyes; but Grace, as before, sternly repressed them, as she would any other evil thought, and brushed the unbidden tears away. No sad thoughts or tender remembrances should interfere with the solemn promise she had made; her line of duty was cast in this world, and should be strictly followed and undeviatingly pursued. Anything else would be sinful and wrong; and no unworthy thought up to this, her twenty-third Christmas Day, had sullied the tender purity of the dear girl's head!

And as she took her seat on the car, her blue, thickly-lined cloak around her, the hood whereof, falling over her head, concealed all but her face and eyes, anyone who caught a glimpse of the latter, and saw their wondrous handsomeness and winsome grace, might fairly say that if the

innocence within matched the beauty outside, it was not a girl's form, but that of an angel, that was on her way to the Chapel of Boulavogue!

But all the way to the chapel, over the snow that lay like a winding-sheet on the roads and on the country, Grace noticed that the crowds of people whom they passed going in the same direction, and with the same object as themselves, had, as they saluted herself and her mother, or exchanged a word with Murrough, who, sitting at the other side, drove them, a curious and unusual expression on their faces.

But whether it was of affright, or sorrow, or pity, or whether it concerned herself or no, Grace had no notion —only that the strange expression was on every face they passed.

CHAPTER XII.

FATHER JOHN.

MEHAUL-NA-CORRIGA rose with the touch of his wife's hand on his shoulder, to find that the day was so far advanced as to make it necessary for him to hurry with his breakfast and his toilet, if he meant to put in an appearance at Mass.

The chapel was some distance away, and when he reached there Mass had commenced.

The chapel was a thatched one, in the cruciform shape, and around it, interiorly, ran a small gallery supported on wooden props, so low that the upraised hand of a man standing erect could easily touch the ceiling with the tips of his fingers. One wing of the building was entirely devoted to women and girls, who, kneeling down, and covered by the heavy hoods of their cloaks, were totally undistinguishable from one another. The other wing was reserved for the little boys of the district, whilst the front portion, that, namely, facing the altar, was occupied almost exclusively by the able-bodied men of the parish.

As usual with the primitive folk of the district, Mehaul, when he perceived that the sacred office of the Mass had commenced, addressed himself to his prayers with bended head and without looking around him.

But when the first Gospel was over the priest took off his vestments, prepared to read out the list of Christmas dues, and to address some words of advice or instruction to his people as the solemn festival they were celebrating demanded. To hear his words more effectually the people closed up towards the altar-rails, and with them moved up also Mehaul-na-Corriga.

The ministering clergyman—he whom we have already seen on the stage-coach—was a man of middle age and of the middle size. His broad shoulders, however, and ample chest betokened great strength; whilst the clear red colour that relieved his massive features gave evidence of abounding health and plenty of exercise. Indeed, no one in his position could complain of want of the latter, for, with a district under his care some twelve miles long by about ten or twelve in width, there was little time for idleness.

A knock at the door of his humble thatched dwelling at night was signal that some parishioner, taken suddenly ill, needed immediate spiritual assistance. Mayhap the call was near; mayhap it was miles away in the headlands of the Blackstairs, whither narrow boreens and winding sheep-paths alone led the way; but, in any case, the active priest was soon dressed, the sacred elements in his keeping, and, seated on his horse, was speedily on his way through the night and the snow to minister the rites of the Church to some trembling soul that was soon to leave the earth and take its flight to the unknown mysterious land!—to make that long journey, alone and unprotected, on which all the sons of Adam must one awful moment venture!

At other times a wedding in some portion of his extensive district brought out his powers of humour and social enjoyment; and, whilst restraining by his presence all undue and improper mirth, added by the charm of his pleasant ways to the social gathering. His handsome and priestly presence seemed of itself to accord a blessing on the future lives of the young couple who had taken one another for life's journey, and whose throbbing hearts felt, in their love for one another, a feeling of gratitude to Father John for honouring their humble wedding with his welcome and cordial presence and blessing. Nor was it alone in these instances that he won a place in the hearts of his people. Most country priets, then

and now, do likewise; but Father John was, in addition to his clerical functions, a keen and clever sportsman. None in the country around knew better the points of a greyhound, the merits of a horse, or the character of a double-barrelled shooting-piece. So that whenever a station was held in any of the districts bordering on the mountains, when confessions were heard, Mass said, and breakfast over, the priest was as ready as any of the young fellows, who had so recently knelt at his knee, for a day's hunting or coursing on the hills. And when the day was ended, and the ample dinner in the farm-house in the evening (where the station was held in the morning) had atoned for the hardship of the day, and he was again mounted on his horse on the way homewards a further bond of friendship had been woven between himself and his people —stronger and more enduring than bonds of adamant.

We have dwelt a little on these particulars as showing, firstly, why the red blood mantled in his handsome face, and, secondly, why the people gathered up to listen to his words this morning. For his advice was always welcome to the people and always fell on appreciative ears.

His face, however, had none of its usual kindly and friendly characteristics this morning. After silently praying with rapt face and attention before the tabernacle, he divested himself of his vestments, and proceeded to read the list of offerings from his people. It was usual on Christmas Day for him afterwards to address some words of thanks and well-wishing to his congregation; but on this particular morning he laid his list aside on the altar, and with stern face stood silently thinking—the while he pinned upon his wrist the white folds of his surplice above his soutane.

Then he spoke—every eye in the closely-packed congregation fixed intently upon him meanwhile.

"Dearly beloved brethren"—the usual commencement of a Catholic priest—"it is with feelings of sorrow your priest stands before you to-day—this holy Christmas morning.

"It is not often he has to address words of censure to his flock, but he regrets that on this morning, sacred in an especial manner to peace and goodwill, it becomes his duty to do so.

"I have been informed this morning that last night some of the soldiers, who, in the interests of law and order were

patrolling the country, were attacked by armed men amongst you, and one of their number killed. I need not tell you the frightful nature of this crime. It is murder—nothing more or less. And not only this murder, but all the deeds committed afterwards by the soldiers in their indignation for the death of their comrade, will fall on the guilty heads of those who have done this wicked and wanton deed.

"I do not address my words to those who have done this. They are beyond my words, as I fear they are beyond grace or penitence. But to you, dearly beloved brethren, whose hands are guiltless of the blood of your fellow-man, I would warn you to have nothing to do with these disloyal associations that are being gotten up through the country. They can end in nothing else but evil, and bloodshed, and ruin. Revolution is only justified where there is just cause, where there is no other means of effecting the desired end, and where there is a reasonable chance of success. The last condition is absent, and the second is wanting also. We must hope that our gracious king will see fit to redress the grievances of his people, but we must not take the law in our own hands. For those who have shed innocent blood last night in slaying wantonly—I invoke upon them the malediction of the Church."

In words stern and solemn, for more than half an hour the priest addressed his auditory, who trembled beneath his glance, until by the time he had done he had them imbued with the belief in some impending punishment from Heaven for the crime that had been committed.

Read by the light of subsequent events, the sermon was a strange one—and a significant one. It breathed the strongest feelings of loyalty, and peace, and goodwill.

Mehaul listened with wrapt composure to every word that fell from his lips, and when the sermon was over, and the Mass resumed, addressed himself to his prayers with great simplicity and devotion.

CHAPTER XIII.

MEETING OF OLD LOVERS.

"GRACE, acorra," said Mehaul, whispering in her ear, as he helped to yoke the jaunting-car in the priest's yard after Mass, "if you happen to see anyone to-day that you didn't expect to see—no more nor any ov the rest ov us—don't be afeard, an' don't be surprised."

Now, the truth was that Grace's mind, whilst she stood waiting to retake her seat homewards, was occupied with the incidents of the morning at home, and was at that moment thinking of Mr. Gordon.

"Who would you expect me to see?" asked Grace, blushing at the advice and wondering how the news had come to his ears.

"I don't know that you'll see any wan," said Mehaul, cautiously, "but if you do, take my word for id, an don't look upon him as anything but a friend—an' a friend you may need, too, afore long."

"I—I—don't understand you, Mehaul," said Grace, surprised at his unusual address.

"No matter. Do as I advise you. An' don't b'lieve all the stories you're hearin', or that you have heard afore now. That's a good girl. God send you safe home. Don't forget what I said."

With which quiet admonition he turned into the outpouring congregation and was speedily lost amongst them.

Grace proceeded homewards in a very unsatisfactory and disturbed state of mind.

There was nothing in the words to indicate much of anything in particular; but they impressed her strongly with unpleasant forebodings. Taken in conjunction with her dreams, which still kept haunting her mind, she could not help thinking there was something indefinitely strange underlying them, for it somehow struck her they did not, after all, apply to Mr. Gordon.

However, she laboured to shake off these unpleasant impressions, in which she was aided by the necessity for constantly replying, as she drove along, to the good-natured

salutations and festive greetings of the neighbours. The morning was bright and pleasant. Occasionally, however, she passed a group of men in serious conversation, which they interrupted to wish the fair-faced girl "a happy Christmas."

A short cut lay across the fields to her home; so, feeling that a walk would be agreeable, she descended from the car, allowing her mother to be driven around the road, and proceeded with a light step to walk home.

The ground was so hard, the air so bright and bracing, that her heart, under the influence of the pleasant and exhilarating exercise, was soon restored to its usual cheerfulness.

She could not, however, help thinking of the alarming words of the priest, and it was with rather a feeling of satisfaction that she thought of the morning's interview with her accepted husband, and the certainty that there would be soon some one to relieve the isolation of their household. Perhaps this feeling was increased just at the moment by the fact that she was passing through the wood or thick grove made mention of in the preceding night, when Shaymus Morissey passed that way.

It would be such a relief to their long isolation and loneliness to know that there would be a head over their household, she thought; to know that there was someone to stand between herself and her mother and outside troubles. In fact, poor Grace, was dwelling sensibly and soberly, without a particle of love entering into the matter, on the advantages of being settled—as millions of excellent girls have done since the creation of the world, and will, in all probability, until its career terminates—when her thoughts were swiftly interrupted by a step and a voice beside her.

"Grace! Grace Cottrell!"

With a swift motion of surprise Grace turned her head.

A cry of terror and surprise escaped her.

"You are not afraid of me, Grace!"

"Watt!"——

"It is I, indeed, Grace, come back after long years to see you again."

He extended his hand timidly, as if doubting his reception.

In the impulse of the moment she gave him hers, but almost immediately withdrew it.

"You are not glad to see me, Grace," said he sadly, noticing this.

"I am glad to see that you are well, Watt," said the fluttered girl, not knowing what to say.

"Anybody might say that, Grace—if you will allow me to call you so. The beggar going along the road, might say that. Have you no warmer welcome for me? But you are growing white as a sheet—are you ill, Grace?"

He might readily have asked the question, for in the start he occasioned her, and the fluttering confusion of her thoughts, she was upon the point of swooning. With a strong effort, however, she recovered herself.

"I am afraid you are ill. I am sure I have frightened you."

"No; I am better now." This with difficulty.

"It was not like this we met in the olden times, Grace."

"Times have changed. It is so long ago. But I am glad to see that you are well. When did you return?" Grace, trembling, asked this question, scarcely knowing what she said.

"I wish I had never returned, Grace. I came back, every step of my way brightened by the pleasure of seeing you—of its bringing you nearer—and you receive me as coolly as if I were a total stranger. It is a cruel disappointment to me, Grace—God knows it is."

The girl stood unable to speak, or, if able, unknowing what to say.

"I travelled over miles of land and sea, Grace, that I might see you on Christmas morning to put my Christmas box on you, and hear your delighted cry of surprise. Oh, Grace, Grace, what a disappointment! The very heart seems dried up within me. Surely, I could not have expected this?"

"You should not have come back."

"Not come back?"

"No. This was no place for you."

"Not for me, Grace. For me, of all others! Not for me! Why?"

The girl remained silent.

"Grace—listen to me—do not go away—I will not detain you long. Since I came back, indeed, only this morning, I heard a story that has been afloat, it appears, ever since I went away. It is about Dick. I protest, before God, I know nothing of it. I protest, Grace—and, if you remember old times, I am sure you will believe me—I know you will, Grace—that, until this morning I never knew but that he was at Knock-Raheen in as good health as on the day I left. Before God, this is so."

"There is someone coming," said Grace faintly, as the voices of persons approaching fell on her ears. "Go away. For God's sake, go away. This is awful. This is dangerous—you don't know how dangerous."

"Dangerous or not dangerous, Grace, I shall not stir from this until I have spoken further with you, though I swing on the gallows before night. I cannot go away without clearing myself in your mind. If the old feelings are gone for ever, Grace—as gone, I suppose, they are"—added he bitterly, "I shall not leave—leave you, and this place for ever, until I clear this matter up. Grace, on that night, when I left——"

"We—you—will be discovered. Oh, Watt, for God's sake go!" cried the terrified girl in agony. "Go away!"

"It was not thus we used to meet, Grace. Is there none of the old love remaining in your heart?" he asked in a burst of passion, wholly forgetful of his previous attempt at explanation, and oblivious of the approaching footsteps. "What have I done that I should be thus forgotten?"

"We shall meet again. We can talk over these things again. Oh, Watt, for God's sake, go away, and let me go home. There are people coming."

"No, Grace—never. We shall never meet again. What I have to say, I must say now, let what may come."

The voices had entered the wood, and were approaching near. A storm of terror swept over the girl's brain—a feeling of horror suddenly benumbed her senses. The strength failed from her limbs and the light from her eyes.

"Grace! Grace! For heaven's sake recover yourself. There is no danger. There is no fear—why should there? For whom do we care?"

But the poor girl was about falling against a tree swooning when he caught her in his arms to uphold her.

The steps were approaching. The hard, crispy, frosty ground gave them back echoingly. Under the circumstances there was urgent need for concealment. What was to be done?

In the excitement of the moment he lifted her fainting form in his arms and bore her into the shelter of the thick shrubbery with the speed of lightning.

A moment more, and the steps had passed, the passers-by in loud and animated conversation.

"That's Murrough—how well I know his voice!" he thought; "and that's Shawn."

For a moment he was about hailing them, but checked himself; and, with one hand supporting the swooning form of the girl, with the other he clutched some snow from the branches overhead and rubbed it against her forehead.

Her weakness was but momentary, and her senses and strength, aided by the cold application, returned.

"You are better, Grace," said he, as, her strength returning, she feebly stepped away from him. "You are able to listen to me?"

"I don't wish to hear anything. We have nothing to say to one another," said Grace with sudden firmness.

"We have, Grace. We have a great deal to say to one another. At least I have to you. We loved one another long ago, Grace; you know we did. Look into your own heart—hard as it is grown—and say if we did not."

"That is past. If ever you liked me, I appeal to you to set me free, and let me go home."

"I do not bar your way, Grace. I only want you to listen to me for five minutes, and I shall never trouble you with my presence again. For five minutes—only five minutes. Will you concede them? Will you listen to me for the last time, whilst with living eyes we see one another? Will you?"

His breathing was short and stertorous; his words full of a wild despair.

Against the promptings of her first instincts, her heart yielded to his words.

"I will."

"God bless you for that, Grace. I won't keep you long—though I never bargained with myself during those past four

years for such a meeting as this. What was I saying? Oh. I remember."

He paused a little, in the permission given him, to recover himself. It was his turn to tremble now whilst Grace gradually grew into composure. As her eyes rested on his stalwart form and handsome face, distorted now by pain and disappointment, did any of the feelings of old time stir up in her heart?

Did any sharp pain, blended of love and sorrow, passing through her breast, melt her strong resolution, obliterate these four years as if they had never been, and restore with all their old strength the hopes, and fears, and love of four years ago?

Who knows?

"Yes, I remember!" He passed his hand across his forehead as he spoke. "It was that Christmas night four years ago. Yes. You remember, Grace, we had been out on the river that night fishing—poaching, if you will. We had landed, and were coming home. I was tying up the boat—thinking of you, verily thinking of you. When did I think of anything else?—when was your face absent from my thoughts? Suddenly a hand was laid upon my shoulder—grasping me. I looked up; it was Gordon—'Torney Gordon—the accursed villain——"

A cry of anguish from the girl's lips stopped him.

"I cannot listen to this further. We are nothing to one another now. Let me go, Watt o' the Crosses. Let me go, I say. The love I held for you once is gone.—let me go."

He was not holding her; but, as she rushed from him, he made a despairing effort unconsciously to grasp at her cloak. But it failed—nor indeed, except in the despairing impulse of the moment, did he intend it for the purpose of detaining her.

But as the fleeing girl passed from his sight he stood as if turned into stone; and then, laying hold of the bough of a tree, he leaned his forehead against its snow-covered surface, while his form shook with the agony of his disappointment and ruined love and hopes.

"Lost, lost, lost!" burst from his lips in a paroxyism of sorrow. "Was this what I came back for? Was it for this I travelled back from France? Would to God that I

had died on the field of battle. Oh, Grace, Grace, woe to me that I stayed away so long, or that I ever came back at all!"

He turned from the place of interview with heavy steps and brooding heart, on his way homewards.

This, then, was the end of his dreams of returning—dreams uninterruptedly dwelling in his brain during four long years. How often had the thoughts of seeing her again, of once more clasping her hand, of once more looking into those eyes which had so often flashed out their glances of delight at his coming—but that now looked so cold and distant—made the onward march a way of delight, and made the bivouac fire alight with home scenes! How often had the marching columns, the waving banners, all the pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war faded from around him, and the homestead of Knock-raheen with Grace's sunny face centreing therein, presented itself instead?

A chilly sense of despair had settled itself within his breast; but as he walked slowly onward, his eyes downcast on the ground, he made up his mind what he should do, what course he should pursue.

He would at once, and without delay, leave Ireland for ever. There was no home for him there now. He would retrace his steps—he would have done that under any circumstances—back to his adopted land. But whilst heretofore he had intended going there for a brief period to arrange matters, he would now make his going final and absolute. He would cast his future life with that army in which he won fame and honour, and throw aside for evermore from his mind thoughts of Ireland.

The consideration of these matters, and the formation of these resolves, brought him to the highroad. Once there, he turned his steps to the Crosses.

Halting midway in the direction, however, he retraced his steps.

"I shall go and see Mehaul, for the sake of old times, before I go," he thought.

Arrived at the blacksmith's house he found that Mehaul had gone to the forge. Thither he proceeded. The smith was sitting alone, with one leg over an anvil at the door, silently smoking and thinking.

He looked up mechanically as the traveller's form appeared in the wide doorway of the forge.

"Well, Watt, so soon?"

"Ay, Mehaul, so soon. That's the word to say. And not soon enough. I come to bid you good-bye."

"I'm glad you do, Watt, old fellow," said the smith warmly, seizing his outstretched hand; "and I'm sorry you do."

"Two very contradictory statements, Mehaul," said the traveller, affecting a pleasantry which he was far from feeling.

"They're both thrue, then," said Mehaul, relapsing into a gravity that might be well called melancholy.

"Why?"

"Why?" reiterated Mehaul. "Avick, machree, it's aisily said. But take a sate, Watt. Pull over that ould sate there, an' let us have a talk. Maybe it's the last iver we'd have—in this world at laiste."

"Likely enough, Mehaul," said Watt, as he threw out the odd tools out of a wooden box, drew it over near the smith, and, placing it on its edge, took his seat thereon.

"I'm glad your goin', an' that you're takin' my advice," said Mehaul, "bekaise there's nothin' but danger around you while you stay. An' I'm sorry you're goin', because——"

The smith stopped.

"Go on, Mehaul," said Watt, preparing to light a cigar and join his companion in a smoke.

"Bekaise, Watt, you're just the very man 'ud be wantin', now, if Wexford was as it ought to be."

"As it ought to be?"

"Just that. If it wor prepared to do what the rest of Ireland is preparin' to do."

"And why is it not?"

"You wouldn't ax that question, if you could go to Mass to-day."

"But I did go to Mass, Mehaul."

"You did," said Mehaul.

"Ay did I, Mehaul, Are you surprised at that?"

"I am. Surely, I am."

"Why? Do you think I have lost old habits because I have been away?"

"No, I don't; but you couldn't have done a worse thing. I mane in the way of danger."

"I have been too often in danger to be much afraid of it now. And, to tell you the truth, it's something, I'm afraid, of the old song which you and I often heard sung—'For though Mass was my motion, my devotion was she,' that brought me there."

"And, so you've been at Boolavogue," said Mehaul, not heeding his quotation. "An' av coorse, you heard what Father John said?"

"You mean touching this absurd projected revolution?"

"Av coorse. What else? What do you think ov what he said?"

"Why, I quite agree with him."

"You do, Watt; you do. *You* do?"

"Certainly. He was quite right. Things may be bad—and heaven knows, from what you tell me, they are—but an open and avowed insurrection would make things worse ten thousand times."

"Well, Watt, I wouldn't have expected that from you."

"Why not, Mehaul?"

"Bekaise you ought to know better."

"So I do, Mehaul; and it's because I do I speak. An insurrection among people with only their bare hands and bare breasts! Absurd!"

"Absurd!" said Mehaul warmly. "Aren't our men, young and ould, as good as the North Cork?"

"I grant that,"

"On the Ancient Britons, or the Yeos?"

"Better a million times."

"Well, an' now, what do you say?" asked Mehaul, triumphantly. "Where 'ud be the fear iv they war united and prepared?"

"See, Mehaul," said the traveller, moving his box-seat closer and placing his hand on the smith's knee, "don't be angry with me if I say a word or two. Promise me that—even though I don't please you with them."

"Musha, Watt, why would you ax me that? Why would I be angry wid you?"

"Very well, Mehaul, I might have known that without asking you. What I say is this—I know our Wexford

people and our Wexford men. So I ought. I was among them and of them, mingled with them in fair and market and pattern, at the hurling and the dancing, from the time I was able to scheme away from the Crosses of a Sunday after dinner, until I left Ireland. When I say that no army ever I saw—and I have seen tens of thousands of men in line together as often as I have shot hares on the Blackstairs or gaffed salmon in the Slaney—could muster such men as you could gather in this single barony of the Duffrey, I think you will admit that I know and value our Wexford people."

"Go on!" said Mehaul, smoking vehemently.

"Well, my knowledge and experience tells me that without proper arms in their hands, the finest gathering of men that ever stood shoulder to shoulder would be cut to pieces like a flock of sheep by disciplined forces, any three of whom unarmed one Wexford man could beat single-handed. It is not the bodily strength of men that tells, it is their discipline and their arms."

"There's not another weapon in the world wide," said Mehaul confidently, "to match the pike. What can their bayonets do afore it? Nothin'."

"There is no better. I know that. I am well aware of that. But the bravest men in the world, with pikes only in their hands may be shot down like hares on the White Mountain, unable to do anything. Besides, where is the commissariat? Fighting men, soldiers, or others, cannot live on nothing. It is hunger and camping out that ravage armies, far more so than fighting."

"Well, but——"

"I know, Mehaul, what you would say. You could not bring *me* to your way of thinking, as I fear I could not bring *you* to mine. But I am leaving to-day; and I should prefer speaking of other matters, for my heart is heavy."

"So is mine, Watt. And you have made it heavier."

"I am sorry for that. I only spoke what I thought."

"I know that, Watt, achorra, Sorra much o' the *fear* was in your heart to make you say it. But for all that——"

"Do you know what I have to tell you, Mehaul?" said Watt abruptly, upon whose mind the necessity for speed was impressing itself, and who, indeed, almost at once became absorbed in other things and had forgotten what they had been speaking about.

"No. What?"

"I've spoken with Grace."

"No. You don't say so? Where?"

"In the grove by the Rath."

"You did, Watt," said Mehaul, removing the pipe from his mouth, shifting his leg from the anvil, and standing upright, facing him. "What did she say? How did she meet you?"

"Badly, Mehaul. No more love or liking than if I were a black stranger. Worse, indeed, than if I were."

"Did you tell her about——"

"I did partly."

"What did she say?"

"Nothing."

"Nothin'?"

"No; not that I can remember now, at any rate. I don't think she heard me. She was frightened at seeing me, I think."

"No wondher, the crathur."

"It may be no wonder," said Watt slowly, "but it was not the less sorrowful and disappointing to me. You can't think, Mehaul," said he in a burst of anger, rising also from his seat, "how often—how often, with bright anticipations—I thought of that interview—how I looked forward to it. But it has come and gone. And—and I am left desolate!"

"God bless your soul! Watt, you don't know what girls are," said Mehaul suddenly. "Now, I know why you talked so downhearted a minit ago. It's many a brave bould heart afore now, that 'ud face death where men only were consarned, lost heart be raison ov wan ov their coaxin' faces. Morebetoken, it's few ov 'em have the blue eyes and *lawgh* face of her. I'll bet you a double-barrelled gun to a sledge-hammer that she's sorrier this minit than you are yourself."

"If you had seen our parting you would not say that, Mehaul."

"You've seen more ov the world than I have, Watt, but I know, I'm thinkin', more than you do after all."

"Know more? You easily might."

"I aisly do. Why, bless your innocent soul! you can no more tell a girl's mind from her words than you can how many hares in a dip iv the mountain by countin' the rushes! They don't know it themselves."

"Her words conveyed her present feeling plain enough at any rate," said Watt, smiling in spite of himself at Mehaul's quaint illustration—borrowed, he knew well, from old poaching practices.

"You know nothin' about it—nothin' at all," said Mehaul.

"It's of no consequence now, at any rate," said Watt despondingly and recklessly, "I leave to-day, and I shall never cast a thought on the subject again. Other thoughts shall occupy me in the future; thoughts that, if not so bright, will not be at least as vain and fleeting."

"Why, then, Watt, listen to me now for a minit. This mornin' I advised you to go away. Now I don't. I know what it is for a young fellow to go away with despair in his heart, and I wouldn't, if I wor you, for some time. We can shelter you for a little while, anyhow."

"It's an advice thrown away now, Mehaul; my mind is made up," said Watt, quietly but determinedly.

"You'd better make it up the other way. No matther where you may hide, I wouldn't go away, if I wor you, for another week or so. I know Grace, poor girl (why should she), doesn't like this match wid Gordon; an' it's only because it's been afore her for the last year or two she agrees to id at all. But whin she comes to think of you, an' your meeting ov her to-day, take my word, old times 'll grow stronger athin her than you think, or than she herself thinks, aither."

"Never, Mehaul; the very fact of her thinking that I am her brother's murderer (God preserve us!) is quite enough to destroy that chance."

"I'll soon—now that I know the ins and outs ov id—change that notion in her head."

"For all you say, Mehaul-na-Corriga, my friend," said Watt with increasing resolution; "I am determined to——"

"Watt! Watt!" said Mehaul, in a sudden exclamation of alarm, catching his companion by the shoulder, and turning him rapidly round, "look—look! in the name of God, look!"

"What, Mehaul, what?" queried Watt o' the Crosses, startled by this sudden burst of fright, and looking at his companion to see what had happened him.

"Not at me, man—not at me! Look there!"

"Where?"

"Through the back window. May I never see the night! if it isn't the redcoats. *Ma chorp an dhoul*, but it is!"

"You are right" said the traveller, quietly, glancing through the opening in the back wall of the forge which did duty for window, "they *are* soldiers—horsemen, too."

"What's bringin' 'em this way?" queried Mehaul hurriedly, while his swarthy face grew pale with excitement.

"On patrol duty, or something of that kind, I dare say," said Watt quietly.

"It's nothin' ov the kind, Watt. It's not that 'ud bring 'em out here on a Christmas day. I'm greatly afeared. I hope it's not the case," said he, sinking his voice, "but I'm afeard av it; they're lookin' for you."

"For me! Nonsense, Mehaul; absurd! How could they hear of my presence? and, even if they did, what could they want with me?"

"It's what I say, as sure as you're standin' there. What'll be done? What *will* be done?" asked Mehaul excitedly, as he glanced at the open road down which the horsemen were slowly advancing, and at the bare uncovered fields around, affording no chance of shelter or hiding.

"I should think what should be done is to sit as we are and let them pass by."

"Oh, the sorra by they'll pass. I'll tell you what I'll do, Watt. I'll make out through the back window and across the fields, in their sight. They'll be sure to follow me at wanst, and you can escape while they're afther me."

Mehaul made a movement to carry his project into execution; but Watt, placing his hand firmly on his shoulder, intercepted him.

"Most certainly not, Mehaul. They might, and most probably would, shoot you, or cleave you with a sabre-stroke, for the mere fact of running away. Stay where you are. You are needlessly afraid. But, in any case, if they want me, let them come."

Mehaul stood irresolutely for a moment. It seemed as if he would burst from his companion's grasp, and carry his project into execution; but whilst they had been talking, and whilst he was standing thus irresolutely, the soldiers had approached, and the opportunity was gone.

The forge stood with its gable-end to the road. The back window gave an oblique view of the latter in one direction; the door in the other. In front was a yard or bawn, open to the road—and, indeed, merely but a widening of it—in which horses stood to be shod, and in which was the large circular trough, full of water, wherein the car-wheel rims were flung red-hot for cooling and tightening.

The tramp of horses' feet, the jingling of the soldiers' accoutrements, fell on their listening ears with painful effect as they came slowly forward.

"Dhraw back, Watt—dhraw back from the doore. Maybe they'll pass on," whispered Mehaul, pulling his companion back into the shelter of the forge wall.

They had come to the gable-end, passed it, and had passed the wide opening of the road leading into the bawn.

It did seem as if they were continuing on, for the steady tread of the horses continued along the road.

"Glory be to God! they're goin' on," whispered Mehaul, trembling with anxiety—not, indeed, for himself, but for the safety of his young friend.

A quick word of command from outside came sharply on his ears, almost as soon as the whisper fell from his lips; and almost at the same instant a sudden movement, and an additional clinking from their accoutrements showed that the horsemen had turned, were wheeling into the bawn, and facing for the door.

"You are right, Mehaul; they *are* searching. They shall not find me hiding, at any rate," said the traveller coolly. "It ill becomes a French officer to hide from his foes."

Suiting his action to his words, he took his seat on the box, and re-lit his cigar.

The horsemen having reached the door, three or four, including their officer, dismounted, and, with pistols in their hands, advanced.

The contrast between the light outside and the semi-gloom of the forge did not at first enable them to see inside, so they stood for a second or so irresolutely at the doorway.

"You had better be careful of that weapon, my friend," said the traveller coolly, as he noticed that one of them fingered the drawn trigger of his pistol, which pointed

directly towards himself, in a dangerous manner. "You appear to handle it very awkwardly."

"Whom have we here?" asked the officer, springing forward at the words and catching sight of the speaker.

"You had better ask yourself whom you expect to find?" replied Watt, arising.

"I believe you are the party we are in search of," said the officer sharply. "Forward, men!" He advanced a little forward himself as he spoke.

"Stand back, sir," said Watt, rising, and stepping back a pace or two. "Don't dare to lay a hand on me. What charge have you against me?"

"Isn't it strange," said the officer, unheeding him, but addressing his men, "that we should find him in this unlikely place."

"And we so nearly passing it only for me," said the sergeant, entering, with a pistol in his hand. "He is the very man."

"He is. Tall, athletic, face browned by exposure, heavy moustache, about twenty-eight years of age, foreign look," said the officer, reading from a description which he held in his hand.

"You are Walter Malone, otherwise known as Watt o' the Crosses—some years absent, but lately returned," addressing the traveller.

"Assuming so," said the latter coolly, "what have you to say to me?"

"You are my prisoner," said the officer, more apparently carrying out a form of law than answering his question.

"For what?"

"For murder and sedition," said the sergeant, breaking in on the officer's statement, and proceeding forthwith to seize him.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ARREST.

"STAND back! Touch me at your peril!" cried Watt, as he drew back a pace or two, and thrust his hand into his breast pocket.

But the pistol he usually carried was absent, and, with a pang, it flashed across his mind that he had parted with it—had given it, in fact, to Traveller No. 1.

Two or three of the soldiers, who had noticed the movement and guessed his intentions, flung themselves on him, and in a second he was struggling on the ground, his captors above him placing handcuffs on his hands.

This was not easily done.

Mehaul made a movement, half unconsciously, to lay hold of an iron bar that stood near. It was likely enough the impulse of a moment, for aid from his single arm was out of the question.

Possibly it was that; but there was little time for him to declare his intention or to do anything else, for the sword of a soldier smote him from behind, on the head, and he fell forward senseless on his face! Fortunately there was not room for the soldier to strike with his full force, nor to aim accurately; so it was but the flat of his sword that came on Mehaul's head, else it would have been cloven open.

As it was, he fell senseless, and the soldier raised his sword to run him through with the point.

Watt's eyes, in the struggling, had caught the motion, and with a powerful effort he flung aside his captors and bounded to his feet.

"Hold, scoundrel," he exclaimed, dashing to the ground the upraised weapon. "This is murder,"

Hastily snatching up the sword, he stepped to one side of the fallen blacksmith and stood on his guard.

"I shall hold you accountable for this, sir," he said, addressing the officer. "I am a citizen of France and a colonel in her army, and I shall have redress for this."

A sudden stillness fell on the group, partly caused by his attitude of defence, but much more by his words.

The sergeant's finger was on the trigger of his pistol, but in obedience to a whispered "Don't!" of the officer, he withdrew it.

"What evidence have we that you are a French officer—even if that made any difference to us at present?" asked the officer, with a sudden change in his manner from haughty carelessness to attentive respect, at the same time whispering to his men, "Drop your arms, men."

"This," said the traveller, throwing the weapon away from him, and stepping over to the commander of the horsemen, handing him a small document from his breast pocket.

The officer looked at it attentively.

"Colonel Walter Malone is appointed to the *Deuxieme* Regiment of Cuirassiers, and will proceed to Toulon for further orders.—Signed, Buonaparte," said the officer, reading.

"I beg your pardon, Colonel Malone, for any unintentional rudeness my men have shewn you. I can always respect bravery, and I know it was no ordinary service that won this honour," said the officer courteously offering him his hand. "No one can know better than you," he continued, "that duty must be performed, and I can only show you this as my authority. Resistance would be useless, and worse than useless."

"I am aware of that, sir; and I do not intend to offer any," said Watt, in return, glancing at the document. It was a peremptory order to arrest the person therein named on a charge of sedition and murder.

"You are satisfied of my authority?" the officer asked, as the former handed him back the document.

"Perfectly."

"And you are ready to come with us?"

"Yes; I am ready."

"Of course I shall take your parole of honour that you shall not attempt to escape."

"I give it."

"You may put up these things, men," pointing to the handcuffs and gyves. "They are unnecessary here."

The officer made a motion, as if they would advance to the door.

"Excuse me for a moment" said Watt, "you surely will not let this poor fellow lie senseless here without help?"

"I am afraid there is no help for it," said the officer. "He brought it on himself. We cannot, we dare not, wait a moment."

"But he may die here if not tended," appealed Watt.

"Even so, we cannot help it. The country is too disturbed to remain longer. The evening will soon be closing in. I cannot risk my men's lives nor your safety."

"But you can send word to his house. A soldier will be there and back in a quarter of an hour," urged Watt.

"Impossible. I regret it, because I should like to oblige a brother officer, even though in a different service; but I cannot help it. He must take his chance."

"But——"

"You must excuse me interrupting you," said the officer rather sternly; "but when I tell you that a patrol of our men, under a most capable and careful officer, was attacked last night by a band of armed men, and the officer badly wounded and one of his men killed, you will perfectly understand how little we are prepared to sacrifice duty to unnecessary acts of kindness."

"At least you will permit me to lift him off his face," said Watt, stooping to lift his friend and place him sitting against the wall. As he did so he was shocked and grieved to see that his face was covered with the stream of blood that ran down it.

That done, and there being no further chance of aiding him in any way, Traveller No. 2 stepped across the doorway in the middle of his captors.

Cool as he seemed outwardly, however, his mind was racked by rushing tides of thought.

Was this to be the ending of his visit? Was incarceration, and trial on a charge—which he suddenly grew to think it would be difficult to rebut—for murder, to be the outcome of his unfortunate journey home?

How cold and cheerless the white coating of snow that, covered the ground as if with a white shroud—like to the shroud of his withered hopes—looked to his eyes as they mounted! And yet how pleasant and seasonable it seemed but yesterday journeying homewards!

How dull and leaden the lowering snow-laden clouds seemed to him—a fitting sky to match his lost love and his ruined dreams of happiness.

In a few moments they were on horseback (a separate mount had been provided for him) and by the side of the officer, and amid the clattering of horses' hoofs and the jingle of accoutrements they swept swiftly forward on their way to Wexford.

There was no one on the lonely country roads to mark their progress. It was the time for the country-people to be at their Christmas dinner, and, even if it were otherwise, most people were more disposed to get out of the way of the red coats than to await their progress on the road.

The dusk had fallen as they neared the little town of Wexford. Here and there, as they cantered through its excessively narrow streets, lighted windows glimmered down on them, and curtains were drawn aside to give people inside an opportunity of bestowing a curious glance on the strange cavalcade—not, indeed, that it was at this time at all a strange event in this town, for seldom a day passed that some unfortunate prisoner was not brought in to be mercilessly flogged on suspicion within its prison walls, or sent aboard the rotten hulks lying in the harbour.

Here and there, also, groups of soldiers roystering about in the streets, met them, with a drunken hurrah for their comrades, or brutal curses and jeers at the prisoner.

But without stop or stay they cantered onward until they arrived at a gloomy entrance leading into a gloomy yard, ankle deep in slush and melted snow. This was the prison yard. It was also the barrack yard.

"You had better have somthing to drink before you go in," whispered the officer. "You are not likely to get much afterwards. The ride has been rather a sharp one."

Watt assented. He had taken but a light breakfast, and no dinner; and though he did not feel hungry he did feel weak, wearied, annoyed, and downhearted.

The officer produced his flask, and his prisoner, having partaken therefrom, was handed to the soldiers on guard, and in a few minutes became the occupant of a dark, lightless, fireless, cell.

He threw himself on the wooden bed, to rest himself and to think over the events of the day.

A great deal had been compressed into the short period of two days. The hopes and dreams of four years—nay, of a

lifetime—had been rudely quenched. A charge of murder—of murder of an old and attached friend—had been laid to his account, and stranger still, had hung round him for four years. And, to wind up the curious and startling episodes of the day, he had at its close found himself an inmate of a jail.

He did not, indeed, think of these things consecutively; they ran in awkward and confusing jumble through his tired brain.

"The last time I heard the tramp of soldiers," he said to himself, as he turned wearily on his side, "or sat in the saddle, it had a different termination. It was on the field of battle; and when night fell I was possessor of the Legion of Honour and the colonelcy of my regiment. What a change! I wonder," said he, suddenly changing the theme, "how is Mehaul! Poor fellow! my coming has brought *him* misfortune too."

In the middle of his self communings tired nature asserted itself, and he fell asleep.

How long he slept he did not know, but he was awakened by a hand rudely laid on his shoulder. A light was burning in the room.

He looked around; two or three strangers were there. He sat up—for he had not undressed—as he saw his visitors.

"You are Watt Malone, otherwise known as Watt o' the Crosses?"

Not scarcely realizing, in his half-awakened condition, what was going on, he assented.

"Where were you these four years—the period of your absence?"

"Why do you ask?"

His interrogator was dressed in uniform, and seemed to hold high position, judging by his appearance. The others were not in uniform.

"You shall know that in good time. Meantime, I ask you again, where you were? You need not answer if you do not wish."

"In France," said the prisoner quietly, considering that there was no reason why he should deny it.

"What doing?"

"In the armies of the Republic."

"What position do you hold?"

"Colonel of Cuirassiers."

"How long have you held that position?"

"Some time."

"How long?"

"Half a year, or thereabouts."

"That is the cross of the Legion of Honour, I suppose?"

"It is," said the traveller, glancing down at his opened breast—thrown open when he lay down to rest—whereon the gold Cross of the Legion, attached to its red ribbon, now sparkled in the light.

"May I ask what brought you back?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Are you prepared to answer?"

"Certainly, I am," said the prisoner on second thought.

"Why did you return?"

"To see old friends."

"Had you leave from the Directory?"

"No."

"No! That seems strange. Why?"

"I was going in a different direction; but was wrecked at sea."

"Where were you going?"

"To Toulon."

"Where were you wrecked?"

"Off the coast of England."

"And then you came to Ireland?"

"Yes."

"Do you ask me to believe that?"

"I do not."

"You do not?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Because," said Traveller No. 1, lifting himself sternly to his feet, "I do not ask you to question me at all; nor do I understand your object. Nor is it a matter that I can see to concern myself with, whether you believe any of my statements or not."

"That is a matter more for us, I fancy," said his questioner, addressing the gentleman beside him, who smiled significantly in reply.

"May I ask you why?" said the prisoner, upon whom the

smile was not thrown away, and in whom a new idea struck root at once.

"Probably you know there is a charge of murder against you?"

"So I am informed. But it is false."

"Perhaps, also, you know that there is an insurrection projected in this country. Is that false also?"

"I know nothing of it."

"Are you prepared to deny that you came over specially to give your aid towards that object?"

"I certainly am," said Watt, with a smile, as his conversation with Mehaul just previously to his capture occurred to his mind.

Surprised and annoyed as he was at this questioning at such an unreasonable hour, he could not help smiling at the contrast between the conversation and the purpose of his visit, as implied in the questions addressed to him.

"What if we were to say that we have proofs, on most undoubted authority, that you have come over for that express purpose?"

"I should say your information was entirely wrong."

"There is a charge of murder against you."

"But a most foundationless and false one."

"Scarcely. Now what I came here to propose to you is this. You have come to Ireland to aid in this rebellion. That is undoubted. If you will disclose to his Majesty's Government the names of the leaders with whom you have been in communication, their purposes, their arsenals, and other matters important for it to know, a recommendation for a free pardon for the crime laid to your charge will be immediately made to the Lord Lieutenant, and, I have no doubt, with excellent effect."

"You make that proposition to me?" asked the prisoner, standing firmly before his questioner.

"Certainly—and shall guarantee to carry it into effect, too."

"And you ask me, in doing so, to admit my guilt of this imputed crime."

"Certainly not," said the General, who inferred from this question that the proposition was being accepted. "All mention of it, and all punishment therefor, shall be at once silenced and remitted."

"You have asked me all the necessary questions?"

"Certainly, Colonel Malone. We do not wish to disturb you further."

"Well, now," said the prisoner, drawing himself haughtily to his full length, "hear my answer, sir. I came here—I pledge the word of a soldier for that—knowing nothing whatever of this projected rebellion. But, if I did, I assure you—as certainly as I stand here a prisoner to-night—I should suffer myself to be hanged, drawn, and quartered, to let my bones drop asunder from the gallows' height, or my head to drop into the basket of the guillotine, before one particle of information of any kind should escape my lips. I have suffered some strange shocks and surprises since my return, but this is the worst, and I feel that my comrades of the French armies are insulted and dishonoured in it."

"You will think better of it."

"Never. And now, sir, as I want rest, such as even a prison cell can give, perhaps you and your friends would be good enough to retire. It is not thus English prisoners of war are treated in France."

CHAPTER XV.

BEFORE THE COURT MARTIAL.

TIME passed drearily with the inmate of the cell in Wexford prison. The morning came; the day ran its accustomed pace; the night fell—the long weary night—but no further visitors came to talk with or question him.

The outside world, so far as he was concerned, seemed to have vanished. No word or news of what was passing in the great theatre of human events came to him. The warder who brought him his meal never exchanged a word; nor, indeed, did the prisoner himself feel disposed to ask questions. The world seemed to him to have died out in the heavy sense of disappointment that lay on his heart.

Occasionally his thoughts reverted to his journey homewards, and when they did he thought over the young fellow whom he had met on his journey, and with whom he had

in the joy of his return and in the added pleasure of its being Christmas eve, exchanged pistols. Also he thought of his stirring life in France, of the camp life, the forced marches, the battles, and the scenes by the bivouac fire. Similarly, also, he thought of Grace Cottrell; and whilst the pain of disappointment lay heavy on him, scarcely felt angry with her, as he thought of the half-told story of her brother's death, of which he had been accused. How he regretted the absence of the youth, and how sorrowful he felt in the knowledge of his death, the particulars of which had been but half communicated to him! So short had been the time in Clohogue and so many events had been compressed into it, that he had but as yet been little enlightened as to the details of the event with which his name had been so wrongfully associated.

In brooding thoughts like these his days passed, and his nights, too, varied only by surmises as to the probable fate of Mehaul, and as to whether his sister and mother knew of what had happened him.

Day came and brought with it these thoughts; night fell on him drearily, thinking likewise.

One morning, however, some weeks afterwards, he was aroused by the clank of arms outside his door. In a few minutes the latter swung open, and a guard entered.

"Walter Malone, otherwise Watt o' the Crosses," said the officer, apparently after refreshing his memory from the paper which he carried in his hand.

"Yes; I am he."

"Are you ready to come with me?"

"I suppose so. I don't see that I have any choice," said the prisoner.

"I merely refer to whether you are dressed."

"I am. I do not need much dressing."

"Then you had better follow me."

The prisoner, rising from the rough bed, on the side of which he had been sitting, took his place in the centre, and preceded and followed by them, left his cell.

Through many a corridor he walked, until finally they brought him into the courtyard, through which he had passed on the night of his entrance.

The fresh air came gratefully on his face; the sky of the

January day seemed brighter than ever he had seen it before—even in France or Italy.

"How would it have been," he thought, "if I had been immured, as many have been, for months, nay years? Heaven help the unfortunates!"

These impressions, however, faded very fast from his mind as he walked across the yard, and as his eye fell upon a curious machine that stood in the centre thereof.

It was a machine very much like what he had often seen in the farmyard at home, used for weighing corn and other matters of the kind.

It was an apparatus consisting of three upright beams, something higher than a man's head, the ends firmly fixed in the ground at some distance from one another, but all meeting in a point at the top, and firmly bound and fastened. Small iron rings depended from these three supports. A small black vessel filled with fluid stood beside.

There was nothing remarkable in all this to the traveller's eyes; but what was remarkable was the fact of a number of soldiers standing thereat, with a young fellow, dressed in the garb of a countryman, in their midst.

"Some new recruit going to be sworn in," he thought, as the scene first struck on his view. But instantly he changed his impressions, for he saw the prisoner was bound.

They were passing the little party, and he was about to ask one of his attendants the nature of the proceeding, when a cry burst on his ears, startling him?

"Watt! Watt o' the Crosses!"

At the same moment a figure—the figure of the countryman—burts from the gathering, and flung itself at his feet, clasping him around the knees.

"Oh, Watt, Watt, for the love ov heaven, save me! Save me! Keep their cruel hands off o' me!"

"What? Is this you, Shaymus?" asked Watt in great surprise as he recognised the face.

"It is. It is. Oh, for the love of heaven, Watt o' the Crosses, save me. I didn't know you on Christmas night, but I do now. Oh, save me, save me!"

"What is amiss, Shaymus?" asked the latter, scarcely able to prevent himself smiling as he bethought of the incidents of their last meeting.

"They're going to flog me. To kill me. Oh, save me, Watt, For God's sake !—do !"

"To flog you, Shaymus ?" said Watt, whilst a cold feeling ran through him as he glanced at the dreaded triangle, whose meaning now became apparent to him. "What have you done ? What *has* he done ?" he asked again of those around him.

There was no reply, nor indeed was there time for a response if anyone were willing to give it ; for two or three of the soldiers around the triangle rushed forward, and catching hold of the kneeling supplicant, sought to drag him away from the place. As he clung to Watt's knees the latter was nearly pulled off his feet, and would have been if those around him had not upheld him.

"What has he done ? What is he about to be flogged for ?"

But the only answer he received, as the unfortunate Shaymus was being dragged away helplessly, was a sharp thrust with the butt end of a musket, as a quiet intimation to him that he was a prisoner himself, and had better proceed on his own business.

With a helpless glance at his fellow-prisoner, Traveller No. 2 walked up, amid his guard, until they reached a stone stairs leading up to another, from which they entered a room wherein, at a large table, sat a number of officers.

A hurried glance at the faces therein gathered, and at the walls around, which were hung with coloured prints of huntsmen and horses, sufficed to show the prisoner the nature of the business which was prepared for him.

Ushered over by his guard to the unoccupied end of the table, he was speedily questioned by the President.

"You are the prisoner mentioned here ?" reading his name and description.

"Yes."

"A colonel, you state, in the French army ?"

"Yes, I have that honour."

"And over here as an emissary for the purpose of stirring up rebellion ?"

"It is——"

The prisoner was about to say "untrue," but his answer was interrupted by a cry from the outer yard, so piercing and

agonising that it smote his breast with a feeling he had never felt before (such was its concentrated agony), and stopped the word in his mouth.

He turned his head round in the direction whence the cry proceeded, but the question being again sharply repeated, recalled his wondering and startled attention.

"It is untrue. I know nothing of what you state."

As he made answer and glanced at the faces on the board he recognised thereat the face of the officer who captured him. There was no look of recognition or greeting on his face, nor did the prisoner expect it, but his glance, for all that, seemed to be the friendliest in the group.

"Address the President, prisoner," said a rough voice, for he had been unconsciously speaking towards the only face he recognised.

This rough address brought his looks in the direction of the speaker. He was a rough, pock-marked man, whose face, filled with carbuncles, and red and swollen, gave indications of hard living, or worse. A blue mark on his forehead and a cut on his temple indicated a fray of some kind, from the effects of which he was still suffering.

"I shall know you again," he thought, as he promptly raised his eyes to the President in compliance with the bullying request.

"I was prepared for that answer," said the President.

A smile passed along the face of the members of the court-martial as he spoke. It was a smile of disbelief in Watt's disavowal, as much as to say, "Of course; what else would he say?"

"It is true, nevertheless," said the prisoner firmly.

"We are not supposed to argue that with you. We have sufficient evidence to the contrary here. Outside of that, however, there is a further charge against you—of murder."

"That, too, is false—false as hell!" said the prisoner indignantly.

"Is not that true, Mr. Gordon?"

"Perfectly; and I narrowly missed death at his hands on the same occasion."

If a thunderbolt had fallen at the prisoner's feet he could not have been more surprised than on hearing the question and answer.

The latter appeared to come from beside him; and, turning round, he saw the betrothed of Grace Cottrell standing beside him. He had not heard or noticed his entrance.

As their eyes met, the prisoner stared again; but his surprise arose from a succession of cries of the most intense and agonizing kind, that came with sudden entrance through the opened window. A shudder of horror chased the blood icily back through his veins to his heart.

His first impulse was to spring to the relief of the sufferer; but the next instant showed him how useless that proceeding would be, and—how helpless he was!

Distracted between the various starts and surprises that were crowding on him, he remained silent.

"Attention, prisoner!"

The words from the red-faced member again recalled his wandering attention.

"Do you hear that statement?"

"I do."

"And you admit its truth?"

"Certainly not. Certainly not. If a murder were committed—of which I was unaware until I heard it on my return,—it must have been this man who did it, for he was the only one *who could*. Yes," said he, turning savagely on the attorney, "I repeat it here in the presence of these gentlemen, that if a murder has been committed yours must have been the hand that did it."

Mr. Gordon withdrew his gaze. His face was very white and agitated; but he kept his eyes fixed steadily on the President.

"I have to repeat," he said slowly and distinctly, that "the young man known as Dick-na-Raheen, who disappeared so mysteriously four years ago, was murdered—and this is the murderer. I witnessed it. I tried to save him, and nearly lost my own life in doing so at this man's hands. That night he disappeared from the place, and never returned until now, for what purpose I have already stated in private."

The audacity of this address so astounded the prisoner that for a minute or two he could scarcely speak. His fingers and arms quivered to tear his accuser to pieces.

His anger was so uncontrollable for the moment that he would have attempted to do so, had not some of his armed guard stood between.

"I daresay it is useless to repeat it here," said he, drawing his form up to its full height; "but here or elsewhere I cannot allow so foul an accusation to pass without branding it as a lie—falser never came from the lips of the Devil—and without denouncing this villain who, liver-faced, stands beside me, as the man whose hand did the deed of which he accuses me—if deed of the kind there were. If I were—"

"Prisoner" said the President coldly, "we are not here to decide on your guilt in that matter, though the knowledge of it may decide our conduct in dealing with you. What we are here empanelled as a court-martial for is, to try you as a foreign emissary sent into this country to try and incite insurrection."

"I disclaim the charge."

"We have proofs of it here—here in my hand. You have sworn this affidavit, Mr. Gordon?"

"I have."

"And you know that his business in Ireland is for that purpose?"

"Yes."

"He was always a *mauvais sujet*, you state?"

"Yes, long before he fled as a murderer."

"And his coming was attended by an attack on his Majesty's troops, wherein one of our men was basely assassinated and Colonel Needham seriously injured. Gentlemen, what do you say? There is no need for further questioning."

"I say, gentlemen, and brother officers," said the red-faced man, whom Watt instinctively guessed to be Mehaul's acquaintance, rising, "the best thing we can do is to give him a dose of the triangle. He has a fancy for the music outside——"

He had indeed—a fancy of horror! as might be seen by his face, when another yell of terror, borne through the window, brought agony to his heart, driving all considerations of self and his present position from him. So overwhelming, so powerful, was it as an instance of suffering!

"What say you, gentlemen?" asked the President.

"We have found the lash a powerful revealer of treason before. It may be again."

This encouraging address brought forth a chorus of affirmative answers.

"The triangle!"

"The lash!"

"The cat o' nine tails!"

Exclamations such as these resounded through the room, broken only by his former captor rising quietly and saying—

"Mr. President and Gentlemen—The prisoner is—he says so, and the documents found on him prove it beyond all doubt—a French officer, holding the high position of colonel. Is it fair, is it honourable, to submit one so distinguished to the ignominous torture of the lash? If he be guilty of trying to incite insurrection, let him, as becomes his rank, be brought out and shot; but I certainly vote against the punishment of the triangle."

"You appear to forget"—said the red-faced officer, whose name Watt knew, from the address of the President, to be Colonel Needham, rising to speak—"that there is something else than his death necessary. We want to get hold of the secrets of this projected rebellion. We want to get hold of the murderers of our men. If he chooses to disclose the leaders of the revolt; if he gives us a full statement of their names, the places of meeting, and positions of arsenals, now and at once, well and good; if not, as the President says, we must try other means."

With which statement the court-martial concluded, and the prisoner was brought back to his cell.

But as he passed the courtyard the machine of torture stood alone, and unattended and naked, amid the bleak surroundings of the place; its mission of cruelty had been performed; its work for that day was over, and another tortured inmate—one of the many that had suffered thereat—writhed sufferingly in his prison cell, alone.

Not alone, however, for the shadows of oncoming retribu tion were around him, and the finger of fate was already inscribing its characters on the wall!

CHAPTER XVI.

ANOTHER PRISONER.

WATT O' THE CROSSES, as he stood once more within his cell, tired and hungry, had abundance of time to reflect upon the new vista opening before him after the events of the day.

In the first place, the threat of flogging stood out before him in all its naked horror.

"I have often enough, heaven knows! braved death on the battlefield, but death in its most horrible shape was nothing to the ignominy of this."

That the threat would be carried out he knew well. The ignorant and ruffianly band of officers who were harrying and outraging the country, murdering defenceless women and men, would not be likely to let feelings of mercy interfere with their intentions. The very fact of his high position in the French service would, instead of shielding him, be rather an incentive to them. It would please their cowardly hearts to know that a defenceless foeman stood before them to wreak their vengeance on him.

"If I had only a hundred of my old regiment, the Voltigeurs, here, how soon I should clear Wexford of these miserable scoundrels," he thought.

But the thought brought very little satisfaction with it. There were no friends near nor in the country that were likely able to aid him; and months would elapse before a message could be brought to France, even if there were a messenger found to run the risk of being its bearer.

His thoughts ran in sombre moods on Mehaul, and on Grace—the faithless Grace. Nay, he would not call her faithless. Perhaps she was not to be blamed. Four years was a long time to be away, and away under a ban which left him little hold or claim on her love; and he had seen enough of the villainy of the attorney that day to know with what smooth false statements he would prefer his love.

But the more he thought of her, and of her beauty and winning ways, and of the old times, the more his heart softened towards her, and the more he revolted against the

idea of her becoming the wife of the oily villain who had that day given evidence against him. The idea came on his mind with horror. He rose from his seat and walked hurriedly about.

Oh, if the day's scenes could be again enacted, and that he got the chance of standing near the villain, it would go hard with him, he thought, if he would not snatch one of the soldier's weapons and brain him where he stood.

His foul plans in regard to the beautiful girl must be contravened somehow. But how?

The question brought to his mind his present position—the prisoner of a ruthless, semi-barbarian soldier, whose very outrages and cruelties were, if not encouraged, winked at by the Government. Nay more, far from being able to render protection, he was himself threatened with tortures which the red Indian would shrink from inflicting on his captives. No; there was no chance of saving her. As little was there of saving himself.

What time had passed in the supreme agony of these thoughts he knew not, but his attention was diverted from them by the opening of his door.

Rather roughly opened, too, and a stranger was thrust in by the soldiers.

The door banged to again on the lightless cell, and, save the turning of the key in the lock and the noise of the retreating footsteps, there was nothing to indicate that a prisoner had entered, save only the shadow of a man standing irresolutely at the door, in the darkness of the cell.

"Another prisoner!" thought Watt. Then aloud. "A companion in affliction, I suppose."

"Why, yes, I believe so," was the quiet answer.

"Rather a late hour for entrance!" said the former, standing up, with a curious feeling overcoming him.

"It is not at all of my seeking, I assure you," said the newcommer irresolutely; "but, pardon me; have I heard that voice before? I feel certain I have."

"I was about to make the same remark," said Watt, in the utmost astonishment. "Is it not my fellow-traveller in the mail-coach?"

"The same," said the newcomer with a gaiety of manner and cheerfulness of words that broke very pleasantly

on the gloom of Watt o' the Crosses' thoughts. "I thought I recognised the voice when you first spoke, but I could not lay it to account of any particular owner. I am glad we met again, but I would be perhaps a trifle more glad if our meeting were under more agreeable circumstances."

"Never mind," said Watt, with equal cheerfulness. "I am very glad, for my sake, that you have come; though perhaps it would be more in keeping with the circumstances if I said I were sorry."

"How did *you* manage to come here?"

"I was going to ask you the same question."

"Well it's easily answered—I was brought."

"Well, for the matter of that," said Watt, laughing, "so was I."

"Well, we are pretty much on a par there. But is there no light? They surely don't mean to keep us in darkness."

"I have never seen one since I came."

"And how long might that be?"

"Well, as far as I can judge, some weeks."

"They must have been very pleasant weeks," said Traveller No. 1 drily. "I think I have a flint and touch about me. Fortunately the blackguards were in too great a hurry to search me, or perhaps their regulations are a little lax."

"Likely enough both. They don't seem to act much in accord with military notions in many ways."

"Well, so much the better."

"Possibly."

Watt's thoughts went swiftly to the subject of the court martial and its verdict.

"Possibly? My dear fellow, to be sure it is. Here goes, anyhow, for the light."

A few strokes produced the sparks, the touch caught them, and in a second a light glimmered faintly in the cell, through the intense darkness.

"I thought I should fix it," said the traveller, as he surveyed the glimmering light, and then the narrow cell. "'Never despair' was an old maxim of mine, though I never had much occasion for it. Good luck again! What is this in the lantern hanging on the wall? Why, a candle.

More power to the hand that forgot to take it—and so disobeyed orders, I have no doubt. Here goes to light you anyhow, my brave candle."

The newcomer's lightheartedness had a powerfully rallying effect on his friend, and when he applied the light to the candle, and its stronger light diffused a glow through the room, he felt as if a new feeling had entered into him.

"There now; that looks better. Don't you think so?"

"It looks brighter at any rate."

"Of course it does. Is that all the furniture in your apartment?"

"That is all."

"You don't mean to say that they mean this for a bed?"

"I don't think they mean it for anything in particular (the converstaion referred to the planks on which Watt had been sitting), "but it suits me well enough."

"I should not care—at least," said the newcomer airily, "I should not take it as a preference."

"You forget I am an old campaigner. I have slept for weeks at a time with my feet to a bivouac fire."

"Well this does not seem much of an improvement on that—minus the fire."

"If there were no greater discomfort I should——"

"Do you smoke? Oh, yes, I remember, of course you do."

"It is not possible you are provided with——"

"Yes, indeed, I am."

"Why, it is not a prisoner that has come, but an angel of light——"

"Of candle light that is—and of tobacco."

"Well, be it so. They are excellent cigars, but I think I am not inclined at present to quarrel with the worst ever taken from a Prussian warehouse."

"Ah, that was your line. I confess to a fancy for Morrell's best, paid for honestly in hard cash."

"I don't quarrel with your fancy, but——"

"But tell me—What brought you here?"

"I scarcely know myself," said Watt, "but if you have patience to listen to a tale, of which I know only a portion, you shall hear it."

"It will be all the more remarkable and interesting for that. Go on."

Sitting on the planks before-mentioned, Watt o' the Crosses told his tale, commencing with the events of Christmas four years ago, and down to his interview with the court-martial of the present day.

"Birchwood Gordon!" said his companion, "Birchwood Gordon, the attorney. I think I know him."

"Scarcely. I don't think you could."

"I rather think I do."

"You have not been in Wexford before, you told me?"

"No; but *he* has been in Dublin."

"Dublin is a large place."

"Nevertheless I have met him."

"What sort is he, then?"

"Middle-sized—not middle aged, rather a good deal under; bearded, with the mark of an old cut on his chin; strong and active, with a good address."

"That's pretty near it."

"I know it is; but go on with the story."

His companion finished his tale.

"And an unusual one it is," said the newcomer.

"And now, satisfy," said Watt, "my curiosity as to yourself. What brought you here?"

"Why, the fact is, I really don't know. I suppose they took me because I was a stranger."

"You don't feel any particular annoyance over it, I can see."

"Certainly not. A note to friends of mine will end all that. These boobies would not, or could not, however, understand my explanation."

"I am glad of that—heartily glad because of your company."

"But is it not odd that our next meeting-place should be in Wexford prison?"

"So it is. Will you sleep on this? for I am tired, and need rest. The floor will suit me."

After some pleasant chaffing as to who should have the luxury of the bed, Watt ended the discussion by stretching himself on the floor, where, in a few minutes, he was fast asleep.

In which, moreover, he was followed by his companion; and in a short time the cell was as silent as it if were tenantless.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MYSTERIOUS VISITOR.

WATT O' THE CROSSES woke up suddenly to find himself in complete darkness.

For a moment or two he could not bring to his mind where he was, the events of the previous night had blent such curious fancies into his dreaming brain.

His attention was quickly fixed by a sudden tap on the shoulder, just as he was beginning to wonder what had awaked him.

The hand remained on his shoulder, whilst a voice whispered in his ear.

"Don't speak, but listen to me."

Something in the words or voice quickly aroused him to a full sense of his position, and he sat still, the gloom preventing him seeing the speaker.

"There are friends near you. Don't fear. Keep a stout heart. Don't fear for Grace Cottrell's love either—the clouds will clear away."

Watt's heart leaped at the words—in fact, the words were but the echo of his dreams. Bright visions of her beautiful face had been haunting him during his sleep.

He turned to speak, forgetting the injunction laid upon him.

"Don't speak! Don't stir! You are hungry and thirsty. You will find a drink beside you. Take it off at once. Go to sleep again. Again I say, don't fear."

The hand was taken off his arm; the voice ceased; he heard no parting footsteps; but for all that he was assured his visitor had gone.

Astonished at the apparition, he made a movement to get on his feet; but he found himself so cramped and weak that he was unable to do so. He had tasted nothing since the previous morning, and the lying on the cold floor had sapped his strength.

As he fell back his hand rested on a flask beside him. He snatched it up greedily, and, opening it, quaffed off the contents. The next moment he was fast asleep.

CHAPTER XVII.

GRACE BREAKS THE ENGAGEMENT.

GRACE COTTRELL'S flying footsteps bore her home in a state of mind that could only be called frenzied.

The sudden appearance of her old lover set her heart throbbing with conflicting emotions. Notwithstanding all that had been said against him—notwithstanding the terrible imputation attaching to his name, she found that the old attachments were still easily evoked.

That his heart had lost none of its old impression was palpable enough to her. His fine handsome appearance, if a little altered from old times, had gained much in manliness of character. True, the fairness of his face had grown bronzed and weather-beaten ; but his old quickness of eye and warmth of address had been rather added to than otherwise.

He had come back to see her—so he said. Could she doubt him ? Could she even doubt him when he denounced so strongly the dreadful imputation resting on him, and asserted his innocence so emphatically ?

Then his sorrow, his heartbrokenness at her indifference, smote her to the heart, causing the unbidden love to grow more strongly. It was not every day that such enduring passionate love of a manly heart, was offered to a girl's keeping ; and was she right in refusing it ? "

Verily, Grace's heart melted with affection for her former lover long before she reached home ; and as old memories crowded upon her, she had almost made up her mind, in despite of the world, to give him back her love.

But then the conference of the morning flashed on her. Her plighted word to Mr. Gordon, her accepted husband, flashed on her mind. How could she undo the work of the morning ? How recall the promise she had made therein ? Would it be right to do so, even if she had the power ? No, surely not. Her fate was fixed voluntarily by herself, and she must abide by it.

To strengthen her in this came the remembrance of the singular dream she had. It seemed prophetic of the way in which her love and trust should be given.

Then came further disturbing thoughts of the form she

had seen in the garden outside the window on the previous night. Who was it?

She had little difficulty in answering. But what brought the form of her dead brother wandering around that snowy Christmas Eve? What troubles did it portend? And again, what were these mysterious words of Mehaul? Clearly they had reference to Watt and to her brother. How many, then, knew of these things, and what mysterious events were these going on around her, of which she knew nothing, and yet which concerned her so deeply?

With thoughts like these rushing through her frightened brain, sometimes singly, sometimes together, but ever and always the glance of Watt's eye, beaming with tenderness, crossing them like a ray of light—of winsone light—she reached her home.

She was very much startled. But a further surprise awaited her. The prayer-book she had been reading the night before lay closed on the small table at which she then knelt.

In her distress she knelt at the place again, and opened the prayer-book at the Litany she had been reading. A small piece of paper, written on, lay therein, which her eye glanced over unconcernedly.

In a moment after she was at the door, calling "Nisthaus, Nisthaus."

"Yes, Grace, yes," cried the girl, coming at the word.

"Who has been here while we were at Mass?"

"No one, Grace, honey; who would be here? But what ails you? You're as white as a sheet."

"There must have been someone," said Grace, trembling all over.

"Oh, the sorra wan, Grace, honey, darlint, since Mr. Gordon left."

"Who left this?" asked Grace, as a feeling of faintness, begotten of unknown terror, seized her.

"What, Grace, asthor?"

"This paper."

"Faix, I dunno, Grace. What is it?"

"Read it."

The girl took it in her hands and read it.

It was simple enough. It merely contained the words, unsigned—

"*Have nothing to do with Birchwood Gordon. Recall your words of this morning.*"

"I dunno, Grace, aroon. Where did you get it?"

"In my prayer-book."

"In your prayer-book, alanna?"

"Yes."

"Sorra wan was here since; I'd swaare that on the Mass-book. But, jewel, aroon that needn't afrightened you. Shure you needn't mind it, if you don't like. Why would it frighten you?"

"It is Dick's—my brother's handwriting," said Grace, as every drop of blood seemed suddenly to have vanished from her face.

"Dick's? For the love of Heaven, don't say that. Don't everyone know——"

Whatever else Nisthaus had to say faded from her lips, as she sprang forward to catch her young mistress, who was falling to the ground.

She carried the poor girl over to the bed and placed her thereon; bathed her forehead with cold water, and slapped her hands, to restore sensibility, whilst her loud outcries brought the household around her.

But their united efforts were fruitless for the present. It was late in the evening when she recovered herself.

But it was from bad to worse. Grace awoke in a raging brain fever.

The doctor was hurriedly sent for to Wexford, but when he arrived and diagnosed the symptoms, he concluded at once that the fever had arisen from a violent shock.

Nisthaus was questioned closely as to what she knew of it. But she, like her mistress, was so greatly frightened, and her brain—never very clear—had grown so confused, that she could only incoherently narrate the cause.

Her story was so vague and wild that few could understand it, and fewer still believed it. To make matters worse, the paper on which she laid such incoherent stress was nowhere to be found. In the confusion of the day it had mysteriously disappeared—had been trodden on, or carried away, or swept out; but it was not to be found.

And to make matters still worse, and to leave the mystery still more complete, Nisthaus herself took seriously ill. So

that the Christmas night fell on a distressed household, in sad and striking contrast with its peaceful, quiet, undisturbed comfort of the preceding night.

For several weeks Grace lay on her bed of illness, wholly unconscious of all around her.

No token of consciousness came from her, and no word came from her lips, but those which spoke of her brother and his friend.

But from night until morning, or morning until night, the names Watt and Dick-na-Raheen fell with unceasing alternation from her lips. It would seem as if the wandering brain had caught up the names of those she earliest loved, and clung to them unchangingly.

Mr. Gordon called repeatedly to inquire after her and to see her; but on one pretence or another he was denied access to her. Indeed the doctor, who had been let into the secret, had issued strict injunction—in the interest of his patient—that he should *not* be admitted.

So the weary weeks passed over the once quiet farmhouse, around which so suddenly such disturbing influences seemed to have gathered—passed over whilst the sleeping brain of the fevered girl seemed wrapped in death, for, when her opened eyes stared into the endless dreamland, of vacancy and unconsciousness, it seemed as if her senses had departed never to return.

After many weeks, however, by patient kindness and attentive nursing, the fever abated. The light of reason returned to her eyes, and she began to recognise those around. Strangely enough the names so constantly on her lips during the period of unconsciousness faded from them with the return of reason, and more strangely still, all remembrance of the incidents that had led up to her illness had vanished from her, save only that of plighting her troth to Mr. Birchwood Gordon.

That incident was the only one that remained impressed on her after the fever was over, accompanied, however, by an unaccountable feeling of repugnance, which was the more strange, as all those around her kept carefully from her anything which could recall unpleasant thoughts to her.

If it took weeks to recover her senses it took still longer

to recover her bodily strength. The gentle airs of April had arrived before the tender tints of returning health began to appear in her cheeks.

But by the time May had begun to put forth her stronger rays the old lines of beauty had put in an appearance in her rounding face, the colour into her cheeks; and if the lovelight failed to appear in her eyes, there was, instead, the brilliant gleam of health.

Mr. Gordon was a constant visitor from the period of her recovery. Day after day, unless when he was called away on business, he was sure to present himself at the farmhouse by the Slaney. More than ever attracted by the increased loveliness of the girl, he pressed his suit with renewed ardour. Not so much pressed his suit, indeed, as pressed Grace to rename the day for the ceremony which her illness had caused to be postponed.

To all of which Grace replied with a quiet and serious dissent. Her weakened health, the necessity for continued quiet, and many other excuses of a similar kind, she pleaded to his ardour. Why she did so, indeed she could not well tell, no more than why the feeling had grown up within her that the marriage must never be.

Still she felt herself unequal to the task of breaking the contract, or of declaring that she had changed her mind. Indeed the chief difficulty lay in finding any sufficient reason within herself why she had done so. But, in spite of herself and by some curious feeling, certainly not begotten of her will or intention, the feeling of—hardly repugnance (in fact, she could hardly give it a name)—was there, growing stronger and stronger with each succeeding day.

But a time came when this protracted state of things must cease. It could not be expected that a betrothed lover would listen to excuses for delay always, when every indication of her handsome face belied them.

And it came in this wise.

The morning was one of those beautiful mornings that come in May.

The sun shone pleasantly down with a bright warmth that, while it diffused a genial sense of pleasure around, was but little more than sufficient to dry up the night-dews

that lay on the grass. The webs of mist that lay on bush and thorn-tree shone like fairy lace in its brightness, ere they faded under its influence and vanished.

All nature looked bright and the pleasant Slaney had arrayed itself in a vesture of silvery sheen. The tiny leaves had begun to deck the trees, and some of the earlier orchard trees were white with blossoms.

With a sense of happiness pervading her every sense, Grace Cottrell was slowly wending her way across the sloping field that led downwards to the Slaney.

"Good morning, Grace."

"Good morning," Grace replied, with that quiet smile which usually greeted him, as he took his place by her side.

"I am glad to see you looking so strong."

There was no mistaking the earnestness of his pleasure, as he looked into her winsome face. There was sincerity in his every word.

"I *am* growing strong," assented Grace, with quiet, undemonstrative cheerfulness. "I feel I am."

"Growing, Grace; you *are* strong."

"I think I am."

"To be sure you are, Grace darling. No one could look into your face, and see how beautiful it is without seeing that you are."

"God has been very good to me," was Grace's pious but somewhat irrelevant remark.

"I know, Grace—I know. So He has. But what I came here to-day for was this: You will, I am sure you will, Grace, excuse me for being so abrupt; but I am going to Dublin for some days, and my business is rather hurried. It was this: You have quite recovered your strength. Would it not be well that you would fix the day now before I go? I shall be back in a week. Say in a day or two after."

"So soon! It is so soon," said Grace, irresolutely.

"So soon, Grace! Remember how long we have waited. Surely, you cannot wish it delayed further?"

"But this—this has come on me so unexpectedly," pleaded Grace.

"Why, Grace, how can you say that? How often have

I asked you already? How often have I consented to your postponements?"

"But I thought—indeed, I expected—I should have the summer to rest myself. There is no hurry. Why should there?"

Any other excuse that prompted itself to her lips she would have tendered quite as readily; but this came—he had often heard it before—and she gave it again.

"The summer, Grace," said he, with an angry frown settling on his face. "Why the summer? What has prompted you to this further delay?"

Grace was silent.

"Now, Grace, I came here this morning to put an end to this unpleasant and annoying state of delay. I came to have a definite and distinct answer. Will you agree to my proposal? Because, if not, the arrangement had better be broken off altogether."

"I cannot at present," said Grace, faintly. "Don't press me. I cannot, indeed."

"Then perhaps you would prefer that the matter should be broken off altogether. Is that your wish, Miss Cottrell?"

His question was asked without serious meaning, and was merely the outcome of his bitter disappointment and vexation. But Grace misunderstanding his meaning, and seeing in it a way out of the perplexities that enveloped her, grasped innocently and eagerly at the idea.

"If you wish it, Mr. Gordon," said she, gravely, "I think it would be the best thing for both of us. I am not inclined to get married. Indeed, I should prefer never to get married. I feel weak and worn and irresolute, and I fear I should make but a discontented and unsuitable wife."

"Are you really serious in this, Miss Cottrell?" he asked, suddenly stopping, with a peculiar impression in his words and in his manner, which Grace, in her innocence, and reading his will and wish by the light of her own, took to be an impression of joy, and was, in consequence, greatly delighted.

"I do, certainly—I do, from my heart," said she, full of this belief.

"And is it now," said he, whilst his face grew pale with

passion and disappointment, "after keeping me in suspense for two or three years, that you tell me this? Is it thus you treat me, who loved you as no man, I believe, ever loved woman before? Is this my answer now?"

Grace remained silent. She was frightened to see how far she had miscalculated his intentions. But the die was cast in that simple sentence; and on the spur of the moment she resolved to abide by it.

"I repeat it again. Is this my answer?"

"It is better for both of us," said Grace,

"That we should part?"

"Yes—indeed it is. You will have many to love you who are more worthy of you than——"

"You cannot mean this, Grace," said he, in a sudden burst of softness; "you cannot mean this. Say you do not. I shall, if necessary, wait until summer is over. I do not wish to hurry you. Merely appoint any day, no matter how distant."

"I am afraid it cannot be," said Grace, exerting herself to speak the fatal words. "I could not find my way to tell you before, and I am glad this has led up to it. Ever since my illness I have felt a disinclination to—to get married: and it has been growing on me stronger ever since, until it has grown beyond my power to alter it." She raised her eyes to his face as she concluded her words, and shuddered to see the expression of anger and surprise and disappointment that was whitening it on.

"I am sorry, I am truly sorry, if this pains you. But it is better—it is, indeed, Mr. Gordon—that we should both know this."

"And this is your determination?"

"I cannot help it; I cannot, indeed, Mr. Gordon."

"It is not irrevocable; surely, it is not, Grace? It is only a passing fancy."

"I should be only again disappointing you if I were to say it is not irrevocable; and I like and respect you too much to do so. It was only the weakness of my nature—a girl's weakness—that prevented my having told you before. But I am glad it is over now, and that we both know the truth. It will save us future pain and sorrow."

Grace's words were low and gentle, but there was a quiet

fixedness of purpose manifest in them that spoke more for her unalterable resolution than if she had taken an oath with her hand on the Gospels.

He felt it with a pang blended of surprise, terror and despair. He had come to conquer her procrastination, and found absolute rejection. The short period of a few months at which he chafed so much were converted into—for ever. That fair form and winsome face should never be his!

Probably he stood the unexpected shock better than most men would have done.

For, quelling the raging spirit within him, and after a pause, during which they mechanically walked a few steps, he suddenly stopped, and said—

"It is useless now, Grace—you will allow me to call you so still—to tell you how dearly I loved you, and how eagerly I looked forward to the day when you should be my wife. It is also useless to tell you the awful pain I feel at the few words you have told me. But I still believe—I cannot bring myself—my brain would verily burst if I were—to think otherwise, than that it is a mere passing fancy begotten of your late illness."

Grace spoke not, and they walked on again. After another deep pause, during which he was sunk in deep reflection, he resumed—

"I shall not trespass on you, Grace, with further painful words, but when we meet again I trust you will think differently. Try to love me, Grace, for I have loved you very sincerely—heaven knows that! And always, wherever and whenever we meet, remember that, Grace—that you are to me as the apple of my eye, and that your presence is as necessary and as dear to me as the light of yonder summer sky or the air we breathe this moment."

He turned and was gone. They had been walking by the side of a hedge; and almost before Grace was aware of it he had leaped through it and was gone.

Grace stood for some time irresolutely. Her heart smote her for the manner in which she had treated him, and for the pain she knew she had occasioned him. But accompanying this came a sense of relief that the matter was terminated. Amid conflicting sensations she directed her steps slowly homewards. Then she learned that Mr. Gordon

had been there, had yoked up his trap, and driven away without entering, nor indeed without addressing any of them.

To escape her mother's questioning, she retired to her room, complaining of headache, and once there, to escape from her own thoughts, she knelt to say her prayers. When she opened the prayer book there lay before her once again the same slip of paper that had occasioned her long illness, and the words—

"Have nothing to do with Birchwood Gordon. Recall your words of this morning."

In a moment all the events that preceded her illness—the mysterious appearance of the form in the garden on Christmas eve night—the equally sudden and mysterious appearance of her former lover—the sudden and surprising discovery of the scrap with its sinister warnings—flashed across her mind.

To still further perplex her, came with singular vividness the remembrance of her remarkable dream.

When Birchwood Gordon left Knockraheen and drove off in a furious dudgeon, he was for some time at a loss to know what course to pursue. He soon apparently made up his mind, and instead of, as he intended, taking his way to Dublin, branched off at the cross roads, and was soon swiftly flying on the road to Wexford.

Once arrived there he was soon closeted with an officer—the same with the red face we have before seen in the court-martial before which Watt-o'-the-Crosses had been tried, and who was none other than the Commander of the North Cork Militia, who were then earning, as we have seen, a name for terrible atrocities in Wexford.

What the subject of that conversation was we are not permitted to narrate.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ESCAPE.

When Watt o' the Crosses awoke from his sleep he found himself alone in his prison.

The morning was far advanced, as he could see by the light that shone in through the barred windows of his cell.

Wondering very much what had become of his late companion, he rose from his hard bed, and, drawing himself up erect, sought to shake off the weariness and fatigue his uncomfortable sleep had occasioned him.

He had scarcely done so when he heard the key turn rustily in the door. It had been doing so ineffectively for some time, and it was the noise which it had occasioned that disturbed him so in his sleep and awoke him.

For some time he stood still, watching the efforts to unlock the creaking bolt.

"A new hand apparently at the work," he thought, when suddenly the effort succeeded, and the door swung open.

It was a new hand that appeared, stooping down to lift the breakfast which he had deposited at the step pending his efforts to unlock the door itself. As he stood up with his tray the prisoner glanced at him as if expecting to see some face he recognized, but in this he was disappointed. The face and its owner seemed wholly unfamiliar to him.

Taking his seat on the bed, he waited for his soldier attendant to deposit his breakfast thereon, and to retire.

But the latter, instead of doing so, walked to the door and glanced along the corridor outside. Apparently satisfied at what he saw, or with what he did not see, he, with a few rapid strides, was again by the prisoner's side.

"Watt o' the Crosses," he whispered quickly.

"Yes," said the latter, who had been watching his movements with attention.

"You are to be triangled to-day."

The blood rushed into the prisoner's face, and his temples suffused with the fierce rush of anger.

"They would not dare to——"

"Tush, man! Nonsense. Dare! What daring is there

in it? You are—But that's not what I came to tell you. You will learn that soon enough. Listen to me attentively. Are you listening?"

"Yes; go on," said Watt, who was all attention and wonderment as to what was coming.

The warder walked to the door, re-satisfied himself as to the position of affairs outside, and returned.

"You will be brought there bound. It is I shall bind you. Don't speak, but listen to me."

Watt made a movement expressive of anger or repugnance, but he quickly subdued himself.

"The handcuffs will be badly put on. With a twist of your right arm you can readily force them. Just this way. Do you see how it is done?"

The soldier was speaking so fast that Watt could hardly intervene the word "Yes."

"Very well. If I or anyone else near happens to have an arm ov any kind—a sword or the like o' that—what's to prevent you from whipping it from him?"

"But"——

"Don't spake a word. You're an active, supple fellow, at laiste you used to be. Well, it's only a short run to the wall on the left hand side. It's a high wall—bud it oughn't to be too high for you."

"And then?"

"Oh, murther! help! help!" shouted the soldier, catching the prisoner fiercely by the throat and flinging him on the bed.

The latter, finding himself by this most unexpected attack in danger of being strangled, exerted his strength, and with a great effort flung his assailant from him, and in a second after had grasped him round the body, and, with an old knack begotten of his hurling days, had him stretched on the ground, with his knee on his breast, and his hand firmly clutched on his throat.

The whole did not occupy an instant's space of time, but, short as it was, Watt had scarcely time to say, "Villain, would you murder me?" and the other to cry, so far as his position would permit, "Help, help," than he found a hand grasping his collar, and he was violently shaken off his prostrate assailant.

"What is the meaning of this, sir? What keeps you here so long?"

The query was addressed to the prostrate soldier.

Watt, looking up, recognized the red-faced officer whom he had seen at the court-martial the day before. He was quickly on his feet, confronting him, rather annoyed at the ridiculous position he had been found in.

"What is the meaning of this, sir?" the officer said, again addressing the soldier.

Before he could recover himself sufficiently to answer, the soldier, whose face was purple with the blood which Watt's vigorous grasp had forced into it, and whose eyes were half starting from their sockets, said—

"He was trying to murder me, Colonel."

He looked indeed as if very little more would have accomplished the process.

"To murder you?" said the officer aghast.

"Yes, Colonel, sure enough. Only you kum so soon he'd have me a corpse undher him."

"Looks like it, certainly," said the officer, glancing at him and motioning two armed soldiers who stood at the door to stand between him and the infuriated prisoner; "but what delayed you in the cell so long?"

"It was aisy to stay when he wouldn't let me go. If you had not turned up now I'd be a longer time, in it, I'm thinkin'. He'd have the life out ov me in a few moments more. He's the most dangerous murdherer ever stood in this jail afore," concluded the soldier, freeing his stock to give himself more air and allow the choking blood to flow back more freely into its ordinary channels.

"We'll take that out of him presently," said the officer, whose suspicions were now fully disarmed. "Ah, you have your handcuffs with you, I see. Put them on at once. Here then, put your bayonets to his throat, and if he offers to stir run him through. On with them."

The palpable revenge actuating the infuriated warder was shown in the eagerness with which he produced the coupling irons, thereby suggesting the handcuffing which otherwise, probably, might not have occurred to the officer; and was equally evident in the triumphant and insulting manner in which he placed them on the wrists of the wondering prisoner, whom

the bayonets of the soldiers had forced back to the wall against which he now stood. Also it was evident in the ribald effrontery with which, that done, he clutched the bound prisoner by the throat and fiercely hammered him against the wall.

"You bloody villain! You murdherin'——"

"Hold there!" said the red-faced officer, much more offended at the insult offered to himself by the soldier thus beseeming himself in his presence, than about the outrage offered to his defenceless prisoner. "Do you forget your officer is present?"

"I beg your pardon, Colonel; but the villain would have murdhered me if he could."

"He shall get his deserts presently. The triangle will cool his blood. What time is it now? He glanced at his watch. Eleven. Twelve is the hour. Lock him up till then. Let the dog take his breakfast how he can. We shall give him a breakfast of another kind then. He can quench his thirst with his own rebel blood if he likes then. It may change him into a loyal and peaceful subject. Ha, ha!"

With a hoarse laugh at his own witticism, and a bull-dog stare at the prisoner, who still stood silent where he had been bound, the officer and his party left the cell, doubly locking the door after them.

Until their steps had ceased to echo on his ear, and long after, the prisoner could hear his former confidant retailing in vehement language the murderous attempt that had been made on him.

Left to himself, the prisoner remained where he stood when the handcuffs were put on. The strong, determined, angry look that had mantled his face gave way to a rather droll smile as he thought over the business of the last few minutes.

"I know the rogue's face, wherever I have seen him before!" he thought over to himself. "It was uncommonly well done, though. A second later and he would have been caught, with a fair prospect of the cat-o'-nine-tails for himself, I dare say. They were stealing upon him to find out what was delaying him. It was uncommonly well done He'd make a famous Voltigeur."

He glanced at the handcuffs.

"A twist to the right will break them. Will it? Well, my brave handcuffs, it will go hard with me or I shall give you a wrench strong enough. Meantime I had better, as that gentleman said, take my breakfast as a dog does. Better that than go without."

Kneeling on his knees by the side of his prison bed, and with such assistance as his manacled hands could give him, he proceeded to munch the dry bread which had been placed for his breakfast, and to drink the sour milk that stood in a jug beside it.

"I have often fared worse, though not perhaps so uncomfortably," he thought, in rather a pleasant frame of mind, for hope of escape began to brighten within him. "The wall to the left. Well, if my old suppleness and strength have not left my arms—have not died out of them in this confounded cell—it will be a high wall that will stop me."

Thinking that, if the occasion were likely to present itself to him, he had better prepare himself for it, he began to pace vigorously up and down the few feet that his cell permitted, to make the blood run freely in his veins, and to warm himself for the effort.

"Where is my companion of last night?" he thought. "Where did he go to? Who brought him away, and how was it I did not hear his departure? I must have slept very soundly. And, by-the-by, that reminds me of that other curious visitor of last night. Who was he? Friends seem to spring out of the ground here."

Occupied with these thoughts, as he paced his cell with rapid steps up and down and around, the time flew by rapidly; so rapidly that it was with a shock of vague surprise he heard the tramp of approaching men, and heard the key once more turn in the rusty lock.

A number of soldiers entered, and with very little ceremony he was bundled out in their midst into the courtyard.

How quickly his eye, with furtive glances, took in the surroundings!

There, right in the centre, stood the dreaded triangle, at which Shaymus had suffered yesterday so grievously, and at which the manhood had been beaten out of many a gallant heart. There, also, to his left, was the wall bordering

the east side of the courtyard, beyond which lay the waters of the harbour, with its numberless boats and shipping. Rather a high wall, but still not too much for his strength and nimbleness, if the damp floor and walls of the cell had not deadened his muscles. All this the prisoner took in at a quick glance, and immediately drooped his eyes.

"Forward there, men. Bring the prisoner forward."

He looked up at the word of command. The officer was right in front of them; it was the same who had entered his cell an hour before.

In obedience to the order, the men moved forward, pushing their prisoner roughly before them. A few seconds brought them to the instrument of torture.

The prisoner looked at it with a shudder, but only for a second. His attention and interest were otherwise directed.

He was engaged taking note of the surrounding circumstances, and weighing, with a care far more than he would have done were his life merely at stake, his chances of escape. It was very hard for a brave man and a soldier of the Grande Armee to bear on his frame the marks of such vile degradation.

His adviser and assailant of the morning was present, but with eyes glancing in every direction save towards him.

"Is that firm enough?" asked the officer.

"I'm afraid not. It was shaken with the last man that was tied to it yesterday."

"Does it want much strengthening?"

"I think it does."

"What?"

"Some tyring plugs driven here—and here—and here," said the soldier, as he stood with short mallet in hand, ready to execute the requisite strengthening performance.

"See that it is well done—see that it is firmly fastened. We shall teach him when he comes to Ireland next to come with loyal notions in his head. By——, we shall cool his rebelly blood."

"Hold this, while I drive in this wedge," the soldier says to some of his comrades. The latter at once, two or three of them, catch hold of the legs of the triangle, and hold them firmly.

"The ruffian seems to be strong, and will require it firmly fastened. See that you do it well."

"Yes, sir."

"Drive the wedge home well."

The words fell but vaguely on the prisoner's ear. A soldier or two stood beside him, partly between him and the wall. He moves a little aside—a mere step or two—as if his surpassing interest in the work in hand moved him to get a better view of the operation. The movement was so natural that it occasioned no remark. Indeed it was scarcely noticed, so much was the attention of all fastened on the soldier workman.

Prisoner sees the hammer rise and fall—fall with heavy force on the wedge, which runs in a few inches into the earth, thus binding more firmly that particular leg of the triangle in the ground.

"He'll struggle d——d hard when he shakes that out of its place," cried the officer with a hoarse laugh. Which laugh was echoed by the soldiers assembled.

Prisoner hears the remark with a heart which was braced up to the highest point of firmness and tension. Not even the mocking laugh of the echoing soldiers had power to affect or stir its pulses. A quick look up and glance round was all the motion or start it caused him.

One of the soldiers detailed for the punishment, in his hearty enjoyment of his officer's joke, drew the lash in sportive anticipation and struck the beam of the triangle with it. The dull thud of the whipcord, braced with wire, on the wooden surface, caused all eyes to turn in his direction. But the prisoner's eyes stirred not from their downward direction; and theirs were directed again to the operation going on before them.

One glance—one quick comprehensive glance—of the prisoner around. Soldiers were moving carelessly across the barrack-yard, paying no attention to the proceedings. The matter was one of such frequent occurrence that it excited no interest.

"Quick! quick man! Do you want to keep us here all day? Eh!—what?—Hallo!—Help!"

Before the officer had concluded his command to the workman, the prisoner had, by a quick and sudden wrench, snapped the handcuffs that bound him; had snatched the cat-o'-nine-tails from the nearest soldier; and, flinging to the

ground the one beside him with the suddenness of a thunderbolt, the next instant he was flying with the swiftness of a hare towards the barrack-wall.

The latter exclamation of the officer was caused by his surprise at this movement. He stood, giving his orders, a little obliquely from the straight line which the fugitive should pursue on his way to the wall. But the latter, instead of taking the straight course, was by the officer's side almost before the word was out of his mouth, and, catching him by the shoulder with the left hand, wheeled him rapidly round without his being able, in the suddenness of his surprise, to prevent him.

Then, swiftly drawing his cat-o'-nine-tails, with one overwhelming blow he laid its corded lashes across the officer's face; a second—a still more powerful and blinding one—followed in quick succession, and the blood spurted from the livid wheals the knotted cords left thereon.

Flinging the blinded and bleeding officer on his back with a heavy fall, and throwing the lash from him, Watt o' the Crosses, no longer a prisoner, was with marvellous rapidity on his way to the barrack-wall, amid the hoarse cries and exclamations of the soldiers.

Laying one hand on the wall, he bounded over it as lightly as a greyhound. His old training on the Blackstairs stood him in good stead in his need; and, with the iron vigour and determination that braced him, he would have as readily cleared it were it as high again.

All this occurred in a few seconds.

The soldiers, when the cry of their officer drew their attention, were so taken aback, that they could scarcely realise what had happened. Still less could they comprehend what he wanted with their officer. It was not till they saw the latter flung bleeding on the ground, and their prisoner, with greyhound speed, making for the wall, that their paralysed senses recovered themselves, and they perceived in very deed and truth that their prisoner was escaping under their eyes.

"Catch him!"

"Seize him!"

"He's ecaping! Prisoner escaping!"

These cries from half-a-dozen mouths rang around the triangle, and were quickly taken up in the barrack-yard.

Some of the more quick-minded ran in pursuit, but long before they had reached the wall the prisoner had vanished over it. Even when they reached it the wall was far too high for them to be able to do more than to place their hands on the top of it; they were unable even to scale it.

Others ran to the central gate, but that was, in consequence of the disturbed state of the country—a disturbance, by the way, of the authorities' own creating—safely locked, and the pacing sentinel inside had failed to see the escaping prisoner, and, what was even worse, had not the keys with him.

The cries and excited shouts of the soldiers brought their comrades crowding from the barrack into the barrack-yard, their presence merely adding to the confusion.

But the most frantic in the effort to pursue and catch the fugitive was the soldier warder who had given him the friendly hint in the morning. And the first also to bethink him of the keys, and to swiftly run and bring them.

But the gate once opened, the fugitive was nowhere visible to the eyes of the rushing crowd of soldiers that emerged therefrom. Several persons passing along, hearing the confusion that existed within, and knowing from experience what military *emeutes* in the town generally led to as far as the townsmen were concerned, made haste to escape as quickly as they could, so that through various streets of Wexford flying fugitives might be seen pursued with headlong haste by bands of soldiers. But in all cases these latter found, to their infinite vexation, when amidst cuffing and other rough usage they bore their captives back to the barrack, that they had in all cases brought the wrong man. Whereupon, as some consolation for their mistakes, they kicked the unfortunate citizens, with great *gout*, out through the barrack-gate.

A court-martial was immediately convened to consider this extraordinary incident. One of its members of the previous day was, however, absent. The red-faced Colonel of the North Cork Militia lay half insensible on his bed, his face marked with the livid strokes which the descending cords of the lash in the vigorous hands of the escaping prisoner had left thereon, or gashed with cuts where the iron lash had swept the skin away in the merciless blows.

A new importance and significance was now attached to

their former prisoner. A feeling of unknown dread and danger pervaded the court-martial. The high military position of the escaped prisoner was remembered, and as the bravery and daring of the officers of the French revolutionary armies was well-known, and as the individual members of the court, though brave enough against the flying unarmed peasants, were otherwise not of the highest order, a vague sense of alarm and dread strongly pervaded them. The very name of a French officer was enough to conjure up ideas of peasant armies carrying everything before them, of revolutionary forces attacking and overtopping disciplined ranks; and in fact it would not have been deemed by them anything extraordinary if multitudes of insurgents were to be seen before nightfall, or after, advancing to attack the town.

The first project, therefore, was to treble the guards at all the gates and approaches to the barracks—which was quickly acted upon. The second, to send out mounted patrols to scour the roads by which the fugitive should have to make his way, if he were to try and reach the disturbed districts. But this took a long time to carry out, and in the confusion that existed, a full hour or more had passed before the horsemen emerged from the barrack-gates to the quay, and thence galloping along the streets. reached the roads leading from the town of Wexford into the open country.

"Where had he gone? How had he suddenly disappeared? Why was there no one with sufficient presence of mind to stop him in his career—even whilst he laid his infuriated hands on the officer of the guard?"

These questions, and many others of the same kind, were excitedly asked among the group of soldiers gathered at intervals in the barrack-yard.

To none of which any satisfactory reply could be given.

The daring and cleverness with which the escape was effected struck home to all the soldiers and officers; and it was felt that the mind that could plan and the heart that could dare such a deed could plan and effect bolder things. But it excited very little admiration; it rather engendered a burning desire to get him once more within their clutches, when it would go hard with them if they would not crush the bold spirit within him.

More especially with the North Cork Militia, then quar-

tered there, was this wish hotly and openly expressed. They had so long wreaked their cruelties on helpless and unoffending prisoners with impunity that it seemed an outrage on them that a prisoner should dare to dream of escaping. But the stern punishment he had inflicted, and delayed in his escape to inflict, on their officer called forth their loudest and most blasphemous oaths and imprecations. On the whole, an observant spectator, if such there were, or, indeed, an unobservant spectator, for the matter of that, might have trembled for the fate in store for the escaped prisoner if he once more fell into their hands; his fainting form would quiver on the triangle, and his writhing frame sink into insensibility, long before the plying lash had ceased its work.

In anticipation of his return and capture, some of the North Cork had already begun to prepare lashes, heavily intertwined with wire, the better to tear the flesh from his bleeding back, garnishing their work with horrid oaths as they gloated over the vengeance that awaited him.

As the evening wore on, however, and the patrol parties in the country and those in the streets of the town returned with no results of their search, a feeling of indignation and anger possessed the soldiers, more especially the North Cork Militia, which boded but ill for the unfortunate country people when next they went on one of their midnight raids.

CHAPTER XIX.

OLD FRIENDS MEET.

When Watt o' the Crosses leaped the barrack-wall and came lightly on his feet to the low ground on the other side, he felt a hand touch his shoulder.

"Run! run! Watt o' the Crosses, for the love of the life that's in you, run! Not that way; this way. You'll find some wan waitin' for you the first doore you pass! Run, and God speed your feet!"

He needed no further directions. The whisper was conveyed to him in quicker time than it has taken to write it. He flew in the direction indicated.

How long seemed the time to him, though he ran with

swifter foot than ever a flying hare crossed a brow of the Blackstairs, before he gained the end of the barrack-wall. How vivid every stone of the parapet overhead, every board hanging from the wall, seemed to him ; and how prominently the big letters of the " Whereas " and cautions about arms posted thereon, stood out catching his eyes, even as he went. And as he ran, also, how odd it seemed to him to see two or three young men about his own size, and dressed very much like himself, cross his path, running with equal swiftness in the opposite direction.

All these thoughts came one after another through his brain with the swiftness of lightning as he neared the end of the wall.

Where the wall terminated, a house, one of those belonging to the barrack, stood, forming the end of the range—of that wherein he had been a prisoner. It stood in a few feet from the line of the wall, and in the exceeding swiftness with which he ran he failed to see the doorway that abutted on the footpath.

" This way, Watt o' the Crosses ! This way ! "

A friendly hand had clutched him by the coat ; a rough pull drew him within the doorway. The door was closed lightly and noiselessly, and immediately afterwards he stood in a darkened hallway.

" Follow me, Watt, at once. Come, quick ! "

A strange feeling came over him as he heard the word, and for a moment he seemed as if he were in a dream. Before the intense surprise they evoked in his breast, his late escape, his present dangerous position, all faded from his breast. They became imaginary. The events of the past four years seemed completely obliterated, and as things that only might have been, but were not. Was he dreaming, for the voice that spoke to him now was the voice that spoke to him in his sleep last night.

The quick voice of his new-found host awoke his faculties from their dazed state, and showed him that *he*, at any rate, was real enough.

" Come, Watt. Follow me, I say. Follow me quickly. What are you dreaming of ? "

The words again. The same voice. Had the grave given up its dead ? Had the rushing waters yielded up the drowned and lost ?

Mechanically he followed his guide—up creaking steps whereon no light shone ; by lobbies whose built up windows admitted no ray, up a ladder supplanting the stairs that once had been there, until finally they arrived at a door rusty with the dust.

When the door of Watt's new quarters was opened by the strange guide, a room half filled with broken nautical instruments and other rubbish disclosed itself to his eyes.

"In here you'll find refreshment. Rest secure. Don't go near the window, and I'll come to you by and by."

A gentle push put him past the door and into the room. The door immediately closed on him. He heard the lightly-descending step on the boards, could hear the ladder being removed ; and then he was left alone and in silence, to take note of the hiding-place that had been chosen for him.

Not in complete silence, indeed, for one of the windows partially built up, abutted on the barrack-yard, and the other gave a view on the roadway and harbour, so that faint noises from outside grew on his ears. They were but dim echoes, and, after the stirring events of the past few minutes, failed to attract his attention.

As his eyes became accustomed to the darkened light of his new abode he began to take note of its contents.

Wiping away with his coat sleeve the heavy drops of perspiration that gathered on his brow and dripped down into his eyes, he noticed that it was an old unused room, half filled with broken chronometers, old pieces of brass, ship fittings, and sundry other articles of ship's gear. In one corner, furthest from the window, lay a heap of worn-out sails ; beside it on a small table lay a bottle and glass, some bread and cold meat, with a knife and fork.

Accepting the situation with such equanimity as the circumstances admitted of, he tossed off a tumbler of the liquor, and, stretching himself on the heap of sails, which, after his late resting experiences, he thought very soft and comfortable, he composed himself to think.

And as he did so he found that his mind reverted to its late strange condition of wonderment. Who was his friendly guide ? What singular strain in his voice was it that had called up such strange sensations to his heart ? Could it

be——? But, no; the thought was too strange and improbable to be entertained for a moment.

By some curious association of ideas his thoughts reverted to Grace. What had she been doing during his imprisonment, and how had she thought of him after his departure? Had the proposed alliance taken place? Heaven forbid! If it had, oh!——

To drive away these distressing thoughts he roused himself to take further note of his apartment. He fastened his attention on the broken chronometer that stood near, and wondered how it had come to be broken, to what ship it belonged, and whether it had sustained its injury in a sea fight, and, if so, in what.

Then, again, these built-up windows—built up all but a pane or two, so thickly crusted and darkened with dust that the heavy iron bars across them scarcely threw a shadow across their dim light. What eye had last looked through them? Where was the owner of the eyes now?

Voices came from outside, their echoes mingling with his reflections, and, with curious fancies floating dimly through his brain, wherein Mehaul-na-Corriga, Grace Cottrell, Shaymus Morrissey, the triangle, the barrack-square, all flitting up and down in most incongruous association—he fell asleep.

The noise of the key turning in the lock aroused him, and he started up, wholly unable for a moment, in the suddenness of his awakening, to account for where he was.

The door of the room gently opened—and a form entered. How well he knew every gesture and movement thereof before it had entered two paces. What a flood of old reminiscences rushed into his brain.

"Watt o' the Crosses!"

"Dick-na-Raheeen! my old friend."

"You know me, then," was the exclamation of the latter, as, rushing together, they threw their arms around one another.

"And so, Watt, old friend, this is how we come to meet after so long parting!"

"I am almost too full to speak," said Watt, as they took their seats together on the sail-heap. "I can hardly yet realise that I am not dreaming."

"We were destined to part strangely, and to meet strangely," said his friend; "but it is the proudest moment of my life that we have met again."

"Where did you go?"

"And where did *you* go?"

"Away!"

"So did I—as all seemed to think, however, in the Slaney."

"So I learned, to my astonishment, since I came back."

"And it was only within the past few weeks," said Dick, "that I learned you had left too. Where did you go?"

"It is a long story to tell now, and I am scarcely able for it at present, but I finally found myself in France. And you?"

"Well, mine is an equally long story; but I finally found myself on board one of his Majesty's vessels."

"Which accounts for this."

Watt o' the Crosses laid his hand, as he spoke, on the handsome naval uniform which his quondam brother poacher wore.

"Yes; so it does. That is a souvenir of our day at Saint Vincent."

"Ah, I remember. That was a sad day."

"No rather, Watt, it was a glorious day."

Watt raised himself on his elbow to look at his friend with some surprise; but quickly relapsed into a droll smile.

"Well, be it so. If it won you—Lieutenant Cottrell, is it?"

"Lieutenant Clarence, R.N., at your service," said the young officer, laughing quietly.

"Well, if it brought you honour and glory, Dick, I shall think better of it than I did before."

"Why, does it concern you so gravely as that?"

"Why, yes, it does, Dick—why should it not?"

"Rather, why should it?"

"Why?—but I believe I forgot to mention, or, rather, had not time—I have spent four years in the French armies, learning under the great teacher of war."

"You, Watt?"

"Yes, indeed," said Watt.

"Well, that is a surprise to me. How have you fared, and what brought you back."

"Well, Dick, they call me Colonel Walter Malone in the Grande Armee of the Rhine."

"Colonel! Watt?"

"Yes, Colonel of the Cuirassiers. I had won the inferior grades earlier, but I won my colonel's sword and the grand cross of the Legion at Lodi. But listen! What noise is that?"

"Only the return of the patrols searching for you. They are not likely to find you, though."

"Where are we? What place is this?"

"This is the storehouse of the man-of-war in the harbour."

"Your vessel?"

"Yes. Only four weeks back from a four years' cruise. Our offices are downstairs."

"They will not think of searching here?"

"Bless your soul, no. They will never lay the lash on *your* back."

"I should think not; not at least living, whilst yonder old dirk lies handy to my grasp. I don't fear death, Dick. Few that have won command in the French Republican armies do; they don't give epaulettes there to cravens, I can assure you; but I confess I have no liking for the flogger's touch on my back. I shall never wear the coward's stripes, I trust. It is the punishment for cowardice in our armies. Powder and shot is too sacred to be used."

"Well, it will not come to that. And so you attained the rank of Colonel?"

"Yes."

"And come over to aid in the projected revolution here?"

"Well, no, Dick, I did not. I did not even hear of it. Our hands were full of work, and little of the outer world reached the Grande Armee. I knew nothing of it until I came."

"And how did you get leave?"

"I did not get leave."

"Took French leave?"

"Not that either. I hope you are only joking in that remark."

"I beg your pardon, Watt; it was only a thoughtless pun. What did bring you, then, for I confess you puzzle me?"

"We were going to Toulon, and were wrecked in the

Channel. I escaped with others, and exchanged my uniform to prevent being taken prisoner."

"And, being on English soil, thought of coming home."

"And being on English soil, as you state, thought of coming home; which I reached on Christmas eve, only to hear a very remarkable account of myself, and to meet a series of curious and uncomfortable adventures."

"To hear among other things, that you had murdered me!"

"Yes, to hear firstly to my great astonishment, that you had disappeared on the same night as I did; and, secondly, to my still greater astonishment, that I had been set down as the occasion of it."

"You saw Grace?"

"Yes, Dick, I saw Grace; though I would much rather——"

"How does she look?"

"Beautiful as ever; I think even more so. But——"

"In fact she is going to be married. Is not that it?"

"Yes."

"And to Birchwood Gordon—our old friend?"

"I fear so," said Watt, gloomily.

"Well, I don't. And as talking is rather dry work, and as my time is running somewhat short, I think we had better," said the naval officer, filling out two horn tumblers of brandy, "pass the time as we used long ago. And first of all—here's Grace's health; good luck to her!"

"'With all my heart; poor Grace," joined in Watt o' the Crosses, taking a full bumper. "What's that you said about her marriage?"

"That it is not likely to take place."

"Have you good reason for that?"

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"Well, the fact is, Watt, like yourself, when I came with the vessels into Wexford harbour I thought I should like to see home too. But it would never do for me, for reasons I shall tell you afterwards, to present myself as I am now; so having got a few days' leave, I disguised myself, and on the same snowy Christmas night that you visited home I reached there also. My first visit was to Mehaul-na-Corriga, but

unfortunately he was not accessible, so I remained at the forge until he should return from your house, whither he had gone."

"So he did; I found him there."

"So I since learned. I knew Mehaul would break matters to my sister and mother, and prevent their becoming surprised at my visit; but it so happened that Mehaul—good as gold and true as steel—did not turn up. Whilst I was waiting for him, where, in the cold and misery of the snowy night, so comfortable to remain as in the warm forge? So I stretched myself in my very seedy habiliments on the hot hearth, and, lo! and behold you! quite contrary to my intentions and expectations, I fell fast asleep."

The naval officer paused a bit.

"Yes; you fell fast asleep. Well?" said Watt o' the Crosses, all alive with anxiety to hear the remainder of the story.

"I think I must have slept very soundly, for I only awoke with the noise of someone searching among the tools, bearing a lighted candle in his hand. At first I thought it was someone searching for a weapon to strike me with, and I leaped from my resting-place with a cry—I am afraid with rather an angry and startled cry. I was always a little stormy on impulse, Watt."

"Yes, I know that. So I ought," said Watt. "But go on. I am all impatience to hear the end."

"Don't be in a hurry; I have an hour still to spare. I sleep on board the vessel to-night, so you shall be sole guardian of his Majesty's treasures until morning. Where was I?"

"You had leaped down from the forge hearth."

"Oh yes; I remember. Alarmed—waking so suddenly out of my sleep, and not remembering for the moment where I was—at the strange man looking for a weapon, and with a light in his hand, I uttered a cry. The visitor lifted his head in greater affright and alarm, and as he did so he disclosed the face of—of whom do you think?"

"I could not guess."

"Birchwood Gordon."

"Birchwood Gordon!"

"None other. I think anything so strange as the look of

his face, when he saw me, man's eyes never met before. With a loud cry, he threw up his arms and fell back, fainting."

"He thought 'twas your ghost."

"Of course, he did. He thought the waters of the Slaney had closed over me four years before—as good reason he had to think so—and my tattered condition, my white face, my sudden appearance, and the remarkable coincidence of the night—all together were too much for him. The very life was frightened out of him."

"And you?"

"Well, I did not wish to be the centrepiece of a nine days' wonder; it would not suit my purpose in any way; and it was what I was most particularly solicitous to avoid. So, knowing he was under the impression that it was my ghost he had seen, I speedily made my way through that open window at the back which you well know of."

"Yes, I know it. Go on. You went home, did you?"

"No; I went to the Crosses. I could not go in without being known. Mehaul and some friends were there. I tried many means of luring Mehaul out, but only with the result, I believe, of thoroughly frightening them all. Finding that, too, impossible, I directed my steps homeward. But the proceedings there I must tell you some other time. They were rather unfortunate, but I am inclined to think they put an end to this precious match."

"How did you know I was here?"

"Why, in the dusk of Christmas Day I paid another visit to the forge to try and come across Mehaul. And come across him I did; for—"

"How was he?"

"As well as might be expected after the soldier's sabre cut. In fact, he was only recovering consciousness. But my ship experiences have made me something more than an amateur in the matter of wounds; and while I was binding up his broken head he learned who I was, and I learned all the news—among other things about you."

"How is Mehaul now?"

"Bless your soul! you might as well deal a blow on the ship's headpiece or on his own anvil. He's all right, except perhaps a trifle more determined."

"And Grace?"

"Never mind Grace for the present," said her brother evasively. "We'll talk about her another time. But I have, I think, intervened between her and our worthy friend for some time."

"That brings me to asking you why did you go away that night?"

"You mean that Christmas night, four years ago?"

"Yes."

"I'll tell you. You remember our bringing the boat with the captured salmon—and fine ones they were! How well I remember them at this moment—to the shore bank?"

"Perfectly."

"And your carrying away the salmon and the net to the furze hill, some distance away?"

"Yes. Just as if it happened last night."

"Well, I was about taking steps to tie up the boat, when I suddenly found myself grasped from behind by two men. By a sudden and powerful effort I freed myself, dealing one of them,—whom I knew the moment after to be Birchwood Gordon,—a blow which felled him. I then stepped into the boat, and pushed her into the river as quickly as I could. It was but the work of an instant. But quick as it was it was not rapid enough to prevent my second opponent from leaping in after me. I knew what fate —transportation, most probably,—awaited me if I were caught and identified, so I was determined not to be taken. My opponent was evidently determined I should, and so we struggled for mastery on the narrow footing, whilst the boat drifted down with the stream. In an unfortunate moment, we, in our struggling, bore to one side, the boat capsized, and in a moment after we were both under the water. All further angry struggle was abandoned; both fought for dear life against the new foe—the drowning river. What further, indeed, happened me I have only a vague recollection of. I remember after struggling against the rushing water and the weight of my saturated clothes, and when I felt that no human aid could reach or save me, I caught hold of the capsized boat and clung to it. I think consciousness must have left me then, for when I awoke I was in the hands of the pressgang. Thenceforward my story is too long to tell.

Suffice it to say that I served in the vessel in which I now hold the rank of lieutenant. And now for the most interesting part to me—What did you do ? and why did you leave ? "

" My story," said Watt, " is merely the outcome of yours. Hearing strange voices in altercation I returned as quickly to the scene as I could. The first thing I noticed was the boat gone—gone somewhere in the darkness ; and the next thing I saw was Birchwood Gordon running up and down like a maniac. He and I had not been on the most friendly terms before that."

" I know," said his companion with a significant smile.

" To make a long story short, he clutched me with a good deal more determination than I had given him credit for. Our struggle was of very short duration, however, for freeing myself from him, I dealt him a tremendous blow that stretched him on the bank. A deep groan burst from him, and he lay perfectly still. It was only then that I noticed that in my right hand I carried the rowlock of the boat, and that with all the force I could muster I had struck him with it. It rushed into my head that I had killed him. I bent over him where he lay. The blood was rushing from the wound in his forehead where the iron had struck him. He lay perfectly still. I tried to staunch the wound, but could not. I called to him. I could not waken him. I sought to lift him up. He was stiff and firm as if he were a corpse. In sheer affright at the deed I had done—in awful terror of the corpse, as I thought, that lay before me, I hurried from the spot, whither I knew not, nor cared—anywhere from that dreadful sight—anywhere out of the country. Over fields and hedges and ditches I made my way in blind affright. Christmas morning broke on me miles and miles away. I hid in a wood when the dawn came, so that the people going to Mass along the high road might not see me. I remained there all the day. At night I continued my journey, and so on until I reached Dublin. Thence I worked in one way or another on board coasting vessels until I reached the coast of France. With what fortune I have told you."

" You must have been surprised when you saw him on your return ? "

"Surprise would have been no word for it. He was the first person I laid eyes on on my return, to know; and, of all places in the world, in my mother's house."

"Yes, so Mehaul told me."

"Did he tell you anything else?"

"You mean about his own adventures that night?"

"Yes."

"He did. Every word."

"I greatly fear the people will suffer for it," said Watt gloomily.

"Suffer, Watt! They are suffering—suffering cruelly. I believe no unfortunate people were ever so cruelly and so mercilessly tortured. The stories I hear would rend your heart."

"I can form some idea of them. Even from what I escaped myself owing to your friendly help."

"After all, I had but a small share in it. It was Mehaul that planned the matter. I only afforded the refuge after you had got clear."

"Mehaul!" said Watt, in astonishment. "Is Mehaul here?"

"Well, he is not far away."

"I am glad to hear it. He is true as the truest steel he ever hammered on his anvil. Where is he?"

"Well, I could not say for certain at present, but you may have an opportunity of seeing him to-morrow."

"Here?"

"No."

"Where, then?"

"In the barrack-yard—if you look through that sooty and dusty pane yonder."

"In the barrack-yard," said Watt, in great surprise. "What on the living earth brings him there?"

"Why, he is negotiating to become the farrier of the troops."

"What?"

"Nothing less."

"You must be joking."

"I never was more in earnest in my life."

"What on earth put that into his head? I should have thought he would as soon put his head on the anvil to have it struck off."

"Then you thought wrong."

"It seems so. But that does not lessen my astonishment. What put it into his head—he, of all others in the wide world?"

"Why, you see, Watt, he became an informer—discovered to them where arms were hidden!——"

"Oh, come, this is too bad," said Watt, rising from his seat angrily, "this is not a matter for joking."

"Discovered to them where the arms were hidden on the top of Lugnagrue Hill"—continued his friend, taking no notice of his angry gesture—"and is in consequence in the highest of high favour with them. But I should perhaps mention that himself and Murrough—you remember Murrough at our house—had previously hidden them there for the purpose."

"Ah! I see," said Watt, upon whom a new light was breaking.

"Yes. It was cleverly done. And but for his thought and intelligence you would scarcely be my most welcome guest this day. But I hear the ship's bugler giving tongue. I must away. I shall see you again in the morning, for though my office is downstairs during the day, I sleep aboard during the night. You will be able to rest here."

"Certainly. I have slept in worse quarters nine nights out of every ten these four years."

"Very well, Watt. I shall join you in another toast, and then—*au revoir*."

The naval officer filled the horn tumbler once more.

"I don't know whether you would join me in this toast," he said, "but, at any rate I give it."

"To Grace," said Watt, whose thoughts went back to the handsome girl of his early love.

"To Grace."

He had often enough, far away at military banquets, where French officers toasted their fair friends in "La Belle France," drank silently to her in far-off Ireland, and the name now came at once to his thoughts and lips.

"No, not to Grace," said her brother, "or rather say to her also, poor girl. But the toast I give, Watt, is "success, to the Irish Revolutionary Leaders, and to Old Ireland."

"What!" said Watt, starting up in astonishment.

"That's the toast, Watt," said his companion, laughing.

"You don't mean——"

"I mean that if the chance comes, you will find the guns of the three-decker yonder thundering, not against the rebels, but their enemies. And you?"

"Well, I hadn't much time to think over the matter, save a short talk with Mehaul; but if there be any prospect of success, even of a determined effort, they shall have my services if they are worth anything."

"Spoken like yourself, Watt,"

"But how did *you* come to hear of this?"

"Bless your soul, the impressed men they sent us on board ship were United Irishmen, every one of them. They have indoctrinated the Irish sailors and marines in the fleet with their own notions."

"So! You surprise me."

"Quite true, then—every word of it."'

"Have you any correct idea of what the movement consists in—for it has all grown up in the country since I left. Have they any arms, organisation, discipline, leaders?"

"I really don't of my knowledge know. But I believe they have all. I shall know more, however, in a day or two."

"Have they even enthusiasm? For that carries a revolutionary army a long way, even in the absence of the others."

"They have. I can vouch for that"—said Dick, laughing—"from those I have met on board. If they do not accomplish great results, it must be by the intervention of one of those fatalities which have often proved ruinous to the Irish cause."

"You appear to be studying these things latterly," said Watt, surprised at the knowledge and fluency of his friend. "They are quite new to me."

"That seems rather odd; for a good deal of the hopes of the country depend on aid from France."

"From France?"

"Yes. Have you never heard of Tone?"

"Never."

"I am surprised at that."

"You must remember, Dick, campaigning soldiers, with a sturdy foe before them, do not talk much politics. You

don't read newspapers amid the thunders of the cannon, and you have little thoughs of social comity in a sabre charge. On a forced march you are much more occupied in guessing the enemy's strength and whereabouts than what Talleyrand is thinking of at Paris. And remember, we have marched nearly over Europe in these four years."

"I can well understand, under these circumstances, how little of Irish news could reach you. Still, I should have thought that the spirit of freedom here would have reached you in one shape or another. Fortunately, it was otherwise with us in the navy. The impressed seamen carried the news with them."

"And you believe in the possibility of this thing?"

"I do most assuredly."

"Well, in that case, they will find me in their ranks also."

"And a valuable accession it will be."

"I trust they will find it so."

"They will appreciate its value, trust me! And, now, good-bye! I am already past my time for being on shipboard."

"Good-bye, Dick."

"You will not feel lonely here?"

"No. I have a good deal of fresh matters to keep me thinking. Our extraordinary meeting for one thing."

"Yes, it is rather a strange meeting, considering how we parted."

Dick departed, carefully re-locking the door after him, carefully also removing the ladder that gave access to the apartment—and Watt o' the Crosses was alone. Four years' campaigning had accustomed him to sleep in the most extraordinary places, and taking another draught of the refreshing liquor, he composed himself to sleep.

To a sleep in which the fair face of Grace Cottrell broke on his dreaming. Bright visions of her white forehead, blue eyes, and masses of braided hair, were woven through his thoughts, and danced in scenes of light and brightness through his dreams.

CHAPTER XX.

MEETING THE SOLDIERS.

For some weeks after the conversation narrated in the last chapter, Watt o' the Crosses remained in his seclusion, visited each day by his young naval friend, from whom he learned most of what was going on in the outer world. But the news he wished most particularly to obtain—that, namely, about Grace Cottrell—he found it difficult to learn. Either his friend did not know himself, or he had reasons for not mentioning it.

It was towards the close of a bleak day some time afterwards that he stood at the window—the little two glazed panes that remained unbuilt up—glancing through its dust-covered glass into the barrack-yard.

He was growing thoroughly weary of his constrained isolation; it was weighing heavily on his spirits. He was longing for the bold adventurous life of his soldier-career in France, and he was thinking of Grace Cottrell. But as the town was full of military he dared not stir. It was well-known to their numerous scouts that he had not left the town, and that although every house had been searched for him (so Dick had said) there was little doubt that he was still there.

A footfall on the boards outside announced the welcome coming of his friend. The key turned in the lock—the door opened.

He turned his head to accost his friend. To his exceeding surprise it was another face that presented itself to him.

"Mehaul!"

"Hush, Watt; for heaven's sake, spake aisier."

"What on earth brings you here, Mehaul? How did you know I was here?"

"Don't spake so loud. I'm comin' to bring you out ov this."

"You?"

"Yes. Are you ready to come?"

"Where is Dick-na-Raheen?"

"He's nigh hand to Dublin be this."

"Nigh hand to Dublin?" said Watt, echoing his words in great surprise.

"Faix, an' so he is. The vessel left the harbour at daybrake. There's somethin' afoot there or in the Channel, or somewhere, that called 'em away; but gone they are for a sartinty."

"You amaze me, Mehaul! Why did he not tell me?"

"He hadn't time. 'Twas be chance I met him. An' he towld me all about you. And here I am. You can't stop longer here. Strangers may be here any minit. Are you ready?"

"Heaven knows I am, Mehaul. But how are we to go?"

"Aisy enough, Watt. You must dress yourself in these."

As he spoke he displayed a bundle which he carried in his hand. It was a soldier's suit of uniform.

"Is it necessary to wear this, Mehaul?" said Watt, glancing at the garments with infinite disgust.

"Unless you want to find yourself in the prison cell you wor in afore," said Mehaul significantly; "an' if you wanst get there it'll be a long time until you get out ov id, I'm thinkin'. To be sure it is necessary, an' get into 'em at wanst, for we haven't a minit to lose."

"In that case, Mehaul," said Watt, rapidly undressing and dressing, "I'd better follow your advice, though anyone that would tell me four months ago that I should wear them would rather astonish me. They're not a bad fit either, by the way."

"They'll do," said Mehaul, surveying them. "Now, Watt, take this knife and pistol. Put them in your breast. There. Belt the side-sword around you. You know how to handle that, I think."

"I ought, at any rate."

"And here," said Mehaul, "did you ever see this afore?" producing a pistol.

"Why, good heavens!" said Watt, glancing at it with excitement, "this is the pistol I received from that young fellow who——"

"Yes, so it is," assented Mehaul, "and it was for this, I have no doubt, he was arrested."

"Where did you get it?"

"Why, you see, Watt, I was in the armoury one day, and I saw it there. And seeing the good it did me one time afore, I thought it lucky to have it again, and so I brought it away. I had not seen it since Christmas night, but I knew it at wanst. It was not robbery, you know. It was not theirs."

"Very true," said Watt, as he examined it with interest.

'Well, we may not want it, and yet we may. Heaven knows. Follow me silently, and behave everywhere you may go just as if you wor wan o' themselves."

With which whispered injunction Mehaul left the room, descended the ladder, the rickety staircase, and out through the hall door, followed by his friend.

"Whither now, Mehaul?"

"I don't know. Wherever God guides us. Walk with me—beside me."

The late prisoner, long pent up in the close air of the mouldy room, felt the cool air of the evening come with delightful freshness on his face. He felt his spirits rise within him as he walked along.

The quays were thick with soldiers—most of them in a state of semi-intoxication. They passed through them, with only now and then a coarse exclamation of greeting from some who recognised the blacksmith.

Thence they turned into a small street that led into the main street. The darkness had descended rapidly. The narrow street was but partially lighted by the candles in the shop windows, and here and there, but very scantily, indeed, an oil lamp was suspended, throwing a faint glimmer in the open street.

Crowds of soldiers were to be seen in the shops of the public-houses, and around the doors, wrangling. As they were passing one of these, a soldier who knew the blacksmith, caught him by the collar and refused to let go until he should have a drink with him. Others laid hold of his companion, and they were both forced inwards. Mehaul had already been known in his capacity as farrier to many of them, and had made himself, by his skill and strength, rather popular amongst them.

"Now, landlady," said the soldier, "a drink for the farrier. Drinks for all hands."

"No," said Mehaul resolutely, "not at your expense; I'll pay for the treat this time."

"All right, you're a d——d good fellow. Who is your friend? I don't remember his face."

"He's not long come; belongs to a new detachment arrived from Gorey this evening."

"Well, he's welcome," said the soldier, in which he was joined by the others, and the bustling landlady placed the drink in pewter measures on the counter.

"He'll have fine fun shooting down the rascally rebels," said one as he half-drained the pewter.

"An' burnin' the b—— vermin out ov their thatched cabins," said a second.

"And chasin' the wretches through the blaze," added a third. "Its glorious fun."

"And if he's fond of a hangin' match we're bound to have one shortly. Stand out, and take your drink, man."

This address was offered to Watt, who was standing at a corner which the light of the suspended oil lamp left in obscurity, so that his face could not be readily seen.

Watt, without moving from his place, took the drink, whilst Mehaul, seeing the danger of the position, and anxious to draw attention from him, asked—

"Who is to be hanged?"

"One of the d——d rebels."

"What did he do?"

"Do. By——! enough to have the whole county hanged. Shot one of our men last Christmas night."

"Shot one of your men on Christmas night!" repeated Mehaul with, in spite of himself, a sudden start. A quick glance at Watt o' the Crosses showed him that he, too, was stirred by the words.

"Yes, indeed—you may well start. I wonder you have not heard it."

"No," said Mehaul, recovering himself quickly; "how did it happen?"

"Why, our fellows were patrolling, and they were attacked, and one of our men shot in his saddle. But we have caught one of the d——d villains, and he'll swing for it. Pity we couldn't give him the cat-o'-nine-tails first."

"How was he found out to be one of the Croppies?"

"In this way; there was a pistol left behind when the d—— Croppies fled. One of the officers had seen it and recognised it as Colonel Victor's. The Colonel was asked what had become of it; he said he had presented it to a young gentleman in Dublin. That's how we found it out."

"Was he arrested in Dublin?"

"Not he. He had come down here—to stir up the rebels, likely enough. Though the odd thing is, he says that he belongs to the Castle himself—though, for the matter of that, it is hard to tell where traitors are not to be found now. The only thing for loyal men to do is to hang them wherever they are found, or whoever they are."

"To be sure. Why not? What else would they do?" said Mehaul, in hearty acquiescence. "Where did they find him?"

"In a house belonging to one of these b—— scoundrels of Croppies; pretended he was ill, but we knew better. He was just wounded in the affray, and was recovering."

"An', av coorse, he'll be hanged soon?"

"To-morrow. He was tried by court-martial to-day."

"An', no doubt, he desarves it," said Mehaul, with a furtive glance at Watt, who was looking unconcernedly in another direction.

At least he was trying to look unconcernedly—for some seconds he had noticed the landlady looking at him occasionally with sharp glances. In vain he withdrew his eyes from her direction and looked towards the ceiling; in vain he placed himself, where the shadow fell most heavily. The quick eyes of the landlady, in the intervals of her business, followed him and fell on him.

At last her inquisitiveness and mayhap friendly good nature got the better of her, and just as the soldier had completed his statement, she said—

"Musha, did I ever see you afore?"

"I think not," said Watt, entirely disconcerted by this question, asked in such a manner as almost immediately to draw the eyes of all present on him.

"I'm shure I did. I'd know your face anywhere. I'll engage it's many is the time you stood at that counther yourself an'——"

"Mistress, another drink. Give us a quart of your best

whiskey this time," said Mehaul, whose quick ear had caught the words, and whose directed attention saw the danger. "An' be quick about id. Don't keep these brave fellows waiting for it wid your ould *ramawshin*. Be the powers o' war," added he, as the gossiping landlady was stirred by his rather lavish order, and checked by his harsh command, "I'm proudher nor more than I could say that wan o' the villains is caught. Many is the sojer 'ud be hurt be the pikes hid on Lugnagree hill only that I found 'em out."

This reminder of the loyal deed he had done Mehaul thought particularly necessary at this juncture, for with all his assumed blustering manner he was keen enough to see that the attention of his soldier-informant, whom he knew by the way to be one of the quickest and most active men in the regiment, had caught up the hostess's exclamation of recognition, and was scanning Watt with furtive but sharp glances. It was therefore time to blazon his own loyal deeds, and throw suspicion off the scent.

"Now, mistress, don't be delayin', but bring hot water and sugar while we're emptyin' these," said Mehaul, filling the soldier's tumblers. "Now, boys, here's a toast—'Success to his Majesty's forces, and the bould North Cork.'"

"I'm d—— to perdition if I drink that," said a soldier of the line. "I'll drink the first, but may I be d—— if I toast any b—— Irish militiamen."

"Here's the North Cork, an' more power to 'em," said one of the latter. "They're the boys to lick the divil out of priests and croppies, and——"

"And who?" said the Englishman who had refused the toast, squaring over to him in a threatening manner.

"I say, boys," said Mehaul, who disliked, for reasons, the stopping of the drink. "let's have peace. You're all brave fellows, an' I'm proud to be among you. Here, we'll drink this, 'His Majesty's forces in gineral.' That's a good toast."

"Ay, that'll do. We'll drink to that," said the quarrelling soldier, satisfied that the North Cork had not been particularly mentioned, and tossing off his tumbler, in which he was followed by the others.

Mehaul did not allow their tumblers to remain long idle, for hot whiskey punch in rapid succession, mixed by his ready hand, followed, whilst he continued to keep the landlady busily engaged cleaning tumblers or bringing hot water or sugar to distract her attention from his friend; nor did his tongue flag, for assuming a half drunken air—

"Here, ye boys, drink off that; there's plenty more kumin'. What are you about sargint, nursin' that little drop o' drink. A bould soger oughtn't to be afraid of anything, much less a dhrop of the craythur. Here's King George, boys. An' may the divil run away wid the Croppies, body an' sowl. Be the tares o' war! it's I that 'ud be glad to fall on another heap o' their pikes hid away. More power, boys, that's the way, toss it off."

Notwithstanding his ready tongue and his quick watching, woman's curiosity proved too much for him. His hostess's attention had been caught by the likeness of the silent soldier to one whom she had known before, or thought she knew, and she was determined to find out whether her guesses were correct.

Accordingly, whenever Mehaul's invention failed to find other work for her to keep her hands busy, she returned to the counter, and leaning on the open drawer inside took another good view of the strnager.

"Faix I know I seed you afore," said the fat hostess smilingly. "Sorra wan o' me but did."

"I think not," said Watt quietly.

"I'm sure I did. I'd know your skin on a bush. And if you want me to tell you that, Watt ov the——"

"Come, boys, one more tumbler an' health," said Mehaul, breaking boisterously in, interrupting the landlady's words, which the less drunken were beginning to pay some attention to, "an' here it is—the North Cork Militia—more power to 'em!"

"Ay, more power to 'em!" shouted some of that corps, who were pretty drunk already.

"Here's—damn them, and all the Oirish as well!" said the Englishman, who was not less intoxicated.

"They're the best men in the place, by G——," said the militiaman, hurling his steaming tumbler into the face of the other.

In a second the place was a mass of struggling men; straps were unbuckled, and in the hands of men mad with drink did furious damage on the faces of their opponents, the steel buckles cutting them open. Pewter measures held by the handle were also fierce weapons to wield; and the few who carried bayonets were not slow to use them. Fighting, striking, swearing, wrestling in savage grips, and trampling remorselessly on those that had fallen, their cries and oaths rang out in hoarse confusion on the street, whilst men within hearing ran to see what murderous conflict was going on.

"Come, Watt—follow me," whispered Mehaul, and in a moment they freed themselves from the savage group and were outside in the street, whence they walked swiftly in an upward direction.

The cries of the fighting soldiers rang out on their ears as they walked swiftly forward, whilst from every direction persons were running through the narrow street to where the murderous row was going on.

A narrow laneway, leading from the main street, branched into the open country; up this they turned.

"Have you got the pistol safe, Watt," Mehaul whispered.

"Yes, Mehaul," answered Watt.

"An' the side-sword?"

"That, too, is safe. Why do you ask?"

"I don't know; but I am glad you have them all right."

"They're all right," said Watt, jingling the scabbard once again to satisfy himself that all was right, for the ominous words of the smith impressed him.

"See, Watt. We are near the open country, here."

"I know that. It is not my first, nor my twentieth, time to be in Wexford."

"True. I forgot that. Well, it is a little early to leave yet. I should rather wait for an hour or so longer. There will be less people on the roads, or in the outskirts of the town."

"I am in your hands, Mehaul. Do as you please. But are you not running too much risk in coming with me? Would it not be better for you to turn back? I can make my way alone."

"No. Where would you go to be safe?"

"Anywhere, everywhere."

"More foolish words you never spoke."

"Why?"

"For plenty of reasons. But there is no use in talkin' over it. We'll go together, let what will happen."

"Do you think that they suspect us?"

"I'm not sure about that. That gossiping landlady was near destroying us; but, anyway, Watt, we'll wait here for an hour or two."

"Where?"

"At this public-house, where you see the candle-light shinin' on the roadway."

"Do they know you?"

"To be sure they do. Who doesn't, in Wexford?"

"If I were you, Mehaul, I'd push on. My own impression is that every moment of delay adds to the danger."

"Maybe you're right," said Mehaul, after a pause, during which, however, they continued their walking. "Maybe you're right; an' now that I think ov it again, I'm sure you are."

"Shall we go on then?"

"I think so. Wait a minit here until I call in; I want to lave a message here for some ov the boys in case anything happens, don't you see?"

"What boys?"

"Oh, sorra matther. Don't ask questions, Watt, asthore. An' another thing, we'll want something to drink on the way to keep the cowld out of our stomachs."

"It's campaigning you ought to be, Mehaul," whispered Watt airily. "You're too *useful* to lead a peaceful life."

"Faix an' it may not be so peaceful at all afther a bit," whispered Mehaul, gravely. "It's a long lane that has no turnin', an' it may be that Irishmen soon can walk the roads, an' fields too, athout bein' afeard ov a red coat. But wait here, or, betther still, walk quietly on. I'll be as short as ever I can."

Saying which he dived into the shop they were passing by at the time. A few steps led downwards from the laneway into it, and that, together with the feeble light thrown by the rush candles, hid him from Watt's sight.

"Well," said the latter, communing with himself as he

walked slowly onward, "whatever may be the result of this venture, one thing is certain, they shall not take me alive. I am sorry Mehaul is with me. He has no right to run this risk with me. Why should I allow it?"

He halted as he thought.

Would it not be the more correct and manly proceeding to give his friend the slip and seek to make his escape alone? That would prevent his friend's bravery and unselfishness from bringing him into trouble. But then again——

"Watt! Watt o' the Crosses!"

The voice came from behind him—a strange voice—and a hand was laid on his shoulder.

Watt started, and his hand flew instinctively to his side.

"Don't Watt! for God's sake don't!" said the voice in tones of entreaty, as the clank of the side-sword in its sheath spoke for itself.

"Who are you?" said Watt, in savage irritability.

"I'm——"

"Oh yes, I know now," said Watt, more kindly, as he recognised the pale, frightened face of the youth he had met on Christmas Eve in the boreen, and whose appealing eyes met his as he walked by the triangle; and whose wild cries came to his ears as he endured the horrors of the lash. "My poor fellow, how are you?"

"I'm wake enough, Watt o' the Crosses; I'm very ill; an' the heart in my body, I think, has left its place. Did you happen to see Mehaul-na-Corriga?"

"What do you want with Mehaul, Shaymus?"

"Who is this asking for me?" asked Mehaul, coming up at the moment. "Oh! it's you, Shaymus Morrissey. What do you want?"

"Oh! Mehaul, honey they're goin' to take me up agin."

"To take you up agin Shaymus. No; bad as they are, they wouldn't do that."

"But they are."

"How d'ye know?"

"I heard 'em say——"

"Who say?"

"The sojers."

"Yes; and what did they say?"

"That he wouldn't escape the triangle this time."

"They did, did they?"

"Shure and sartin they did."

"How long ago?"

"Not five minutes ago."

"'Twas you they meant, Watt. That fellow has spotted you, an' found out from the landlady who you wor. That's the short and the long ov id."

"What is to be done?" asked Watt quietly.

"Come in here," said Mehaul, motioning to the house they had just quitted. "Not now," he added, "but come in after me as soon as you see me enter the door. You must change your clothes, and we must not delay about it."

Mehaul entered the house. When Watt and his friend saw him disappear they quickly followed him through a long passage to an outside yard, whence they quickly mounted a ladder that reached to the loft. The loft happened to be a hayloft, and they were soon alone, Mehaul descending to make some arrangements.

In less than half an hour he returned.

"Well?" inquired Watt, as Mehaul drew up the ladder after him.

"It was just as I thought," said Mehaul. "What Shaymus heard referred not to him but to you. That confounded woman has destroyed us all."

"How did you find out?"

"'Twould take too long to tell now," said Mehaul. "Put on these clothes and pitch the cursed uniform to——. We have not a minit to lose."

Watt was not long in making the desired change; the soldier's clothes were flung aside and the new ones donned.

"Listen, now, Watt, an' you, too, Shaymus, for our lives depend on id. The throopers are gone out on every road. gallopin' as hard as they can. They won't be more nor an hour out till they find their mistake and be back. What I propose is: there's a countryman here—a friend of mine, and of yours, too—who has a load of hay going home. We must get under it, and when we get some distance out, take our way through the fields. It's a risk, but it's the only thing can be done. What do yez think of it?"

"I think it is a capital plan," said Watt. "If we once get a fair chance I don't think they'll be likely to bring us back."

"Very well. Bring your arms with you. Come now. There's not a minit to spare."

In a very short time, with the friendly aid of Mehaul's friend, the arrangement was completed; and along the laneway, and out into the open road, the unsold load of hay was wending its way homewards.

Slowly the cart wended its way, too slowly for the impatient travellers within, breathing through the vacant spaces at the bottom of the vehicle. They could hear occasionally, as the car proceeded, the tramp and jingle of the horsemen returning from their fruitless chase; and listened with mingled feelings to their questionings of the driver and their oaths and imprecations as they found he could give them no account of any stray passenger on the way.

Finally these passed on their way back, allowing the cart to proceed homewards. The latter once again moved on, and the hidden fugitives were again congratulating themselves mentally on their good luck.

After half an hour had passed without further interruption, Watt, who had been revolving some matters in his head, said as well as his muffled condition could admit.

"Mehaul."

"Yes, Watt, I'm listenin'."

"I think we have gone far enough for safety.

"Yes, I think so. I'm nearly smothered."

"And I too," said Watt.

"Well, shall we get down?"

"Yes, I think so. The fact is I have been thinking over what the soldier said."

"What was that? They said so many things."

"About the hanging of that young fellow. We must not allow that."

"Faith, I forgot all about it until this minit. Faugh! this hay is smotherin' me! But how can we purvent id?"

"I'll tell you——"

"Stop, Watt! Don't spake. I hear the noise of throopers' horses. Listen!"

"They are soldiers. There is no mistake about the tread of their horses," said Watt in a whisper, after listening attentively for a few seconds.

"Lie quiet until they pass," cautioned Mehaul.

They settled themselves into the recumbent position once more underneath the load of hay, and listened as the sound of the troopers' horses came in more distinctly on their half muffled ears.

In a few moments they were beside them, and the hoarse cry of one of them, addressing the driver, came on their ears, close beside.

"Where the h—— are you going to at this hour?"

"Plase, yer honour, I am going home with the load of hay I didn't sell."

"D——n your bloody eyes, for a dashed son of an Irish ——(we forbear the expletives) how do we know but it's rascally pikes you're carrying."

"Plase, yer honour no, it's not. I am only a farmer tryin' to sell his hay, an' more betoken sorra luck I had——"

"Hold yer tongue, ye rascally son of a Croppy," said the soldier who had spoken, making a blow at the driver with his sword, which he narrowly escaped. "Turn your horse's head around, and bring that load back again into town. We must search it for pikes. In any case our horses will want that hay."

"Oh, God bless you, gintlemin," implored the alarmed driver, "don't ask me to do that. I'm out all day, an' I have ten long miles to travel, so—"

"Turn round, I say, and be damned to you," and this time the blow that accompanied his words fell sharply on the shoulder of the driver.

That it had wounded him they knew by the exclamation that followed the blow.

Watt's blood boiled, and by the stir that Mehaul gave, he knew that his companion felt the same impulse of wrath that he did himself.

Meanwhile, not waiting for the driver, who had shrunk aside from a repetition of the blow, one of the soldiers caught hold of the reins and sought to turn the horse's head around. The movement required more skill than he, being on horseback, was able to exercise, and the result was that the horse turned halfway round, backed into the deep dyke that bordered the highway, capsizing its badly tied and loosely filled load.

The travellers underneath were nearly suffocated before

they were able to free themselves; but when they had shaken off the hay and were able to breathe, the first sounds that smote on their ears were the cries of the unfortunate driver, whom the soldiers were pursuing along the road, intent upon further vengeance for the accident caused by themselves.

"I shan't stand this any longer, Mehaul," said Watt, leaping forth from his hiding place.

"I think you're about right!" assented Mehaul, leaping sturdily forth after his friend on to the high road.

"Hold there, villains! would you murder the man?"

The hoarse cry—hoarse with anger and vengeance—that came from Watt, rang out on the night air, and startled the soldiers in their career after the driver.

The night, at first dark when they left the town, had grown gradually brighter. The moon had just come out, and the scudding clouds were hastily driving across its face. An intermittent and obscuring light was shed around. But vague as it was, it served to disclose to the three soldiers, who were vainly trying to get at the driver, ensconcing himself in the deepest part of the dyke, the forms of the two men behind them standing on the roadway.

The cry Watt uttered at first startled them, and they reined their horses around in alarm, but perceiving only two unarmed men on the road, they abandoned their former victim for their new prey.

With fierce imprecations they galloped forward.

"Now, Mehaul! keep away from their swords. We have no chance with them, but by skill," said Watt rapidly, as he watched them. "I can dodge the sabres better than you. Keep behind your horse until you get a chance. Now!"

The foremost soldier, in a hurry to be before his two comrades to sabre his defenceless foes, rode in upon them, making a furious blow at Watt, which he quickly avoided by diving under the head of the trooper's charger.

Before he had time to recover his upright position, the latter struck his knife deep into the horse's breast who, frightened at the wound, reared up high in the air, becoming completely unmanageable. Almost before he had time to let his forelegs again rest on the ground, Watt, with one prodigious spring, like to the leap of a hungry tiger, had clutched

the horseman by the right arm, and with the rapidity of lightning struck at him with his knife.

A bright gleam of steel flashed for a moment in the passing ray of moonlight. The next moment it was buried to the haft in the rider's breast, passing through his heart.

A wild shriek of death rose on the night air, the next moment the iron grasp of his assailant had pulled him from the saddle to the ground. The wounded horse, freed from his master's grasp, with the reins trailing beside him, flew in mad career on the road to Wexford.

"Watt! Watt!" shouted Mehaul, leaping forward, as the drawn sword of the second soldier waved over the former for an instant, in one wild sweep before descending on his head. So swift was the movement that Mehaul had scarcely time to utter the cry before the sword would, if unchecked, have fallen on him. For a moment—for a space of time that seemed long to him—but that in reality was not the tenth part of a second—he stood in petrified horror.

A burst of flame beside his face where he stood at the cart!—a sudden crash that he could not comprehend!—and he saw the descending sword fall helplessly from the soldier's grasp. The latter swayed for a second or two in his saddle. A motion with his hand as if to press his forehead; a sudden wheel round of his charger, and the lifeless body of the soldier fell to the ground.

All this occurred so rapidly, and with such excessive quickness of action, that the third soldier had not time to get up with his companions. He had been too much engaged with his efforts to get near the crouching driver, who was shielding his life from his attacks, to be able to ride forward to the fray. But he was only a few yards away from the spot when he saw his companions fall.

Quick as lightning he wheeled his horse half way round, and in the impulse of the moment flew him at the hedge.

In the dull light of the cloud-covered moon, however—or, perhaps, in his excitement—he mismeasured the length of the dyke that separated him from the hedge, for his horse struck his fore-feet against the top of the coping-stones, and the rider was flung with terrific force beyond it, on his head.

The former struggled to his feet, and galloped after the other horses, but with a dull groan the latter lay where he fell.

"He is dead," said Watt, as he turned him on his side.

"Don't mind him, Watt. We have no time to lose," said Mehaul, energetically. "Here's a poor fellow better worth minding. Are you much hurt, Murrough?"

"I'd be worse only for you, Mehaul," said the impromptu driver. "I've got a bad cut on the shoulder. It's bleedin' fast."

"Strip off your coat. I'll bind it up for you. You'll pay some of 'em for this, wan o' these days."

"I hope I won't owe it to 'em long," said Murrough, "I'll be unaisy 'till I pay id back."

"Ay, you war always an honest fellow, Murrough—sorra more so," said the smith, unable to resist a grim joke, as he tied up the gash, which was bleeding furiously.

"What'll we do wid the load?" asked Murrough, as soon as the operation was satisfactorily completed. "We can't take it home."

"No, nor we can't lave id here," said a third party.

"Why, botheration! is this you, Shaymus?"

"Begorra, an' so it is, Murrough," said Shaymus.

"Blood and tundher, Shaymus," said Mehaul, "I had almost forgotten you. Was it you fired that shot?"

"Me own four bones," said Shaymus, holding up the pistol which he held smoking in his hand.

"I didn't know you had wan."

"If I hadn't we wouldn't be standin' here now. Watt o' the Crosses ud be lyin' where that gintleman is now."

"It came in the nick ov time," said Mehaul. "I never saw a thing nater done in all my life. Be all the goats in Gorey—but, faix, this is no time for talkin'. Where is Watt?"

"Here," said Watt, who had been investigating the condition of the fallen soldiers. "They're both dead."

"Well, they'll never do any more mischief. What are we goin' to do?" Mehaul asked.

"I'll tell yez what we'll do," said Shaymus. Let Murrough ride home as fast as he can——."

"An' have the sojers afther me to burn the house and murdher every wan in id when they see the name on the dhray."

"What would you lave id here for?"

"What are we to do wid it?"

"What are we to do wid it?" reiterated Shaymus, with the resolution of one that had done his part well. "Why, burn it; what else? Let them read the writin' then. It'll be in big print for them."

"The very thing, Shaymus," said Mehaul. Bad scran to me, if ever I thought you wor so stout or so clever. What do you say, Murrough?"

"The very thing," said the latter.

"Well, boys, lend a hand at wanst. We have not a minit to spare."

In a few minutes the hay was piled around the cart, broken boards and bushes flung under it; a spark from a tinder fired it, and as the light flared into the sky they left the place.

"You know the boreen, Murrough. I'd ride that a-way. I wouldn't go the high-road if I wor you," said Mehaul.

"That's what I'm just thinkin'," said Murrough.

"We'll be off now, in God's name. We can strike off through the fields."

"Good-night, boys," whispered Murrough, as he led his horse into the narrow boreen and galloped off, the horse's hoofs, on the soft soil, making but little noise. In a short time he was completely out of hearing.

"Mehaul!" said Watt, as they ran swiftly after him, and turned off by a thick hedge through the fields.

"I'm listenin', Watt, but spake aisier."

"This young fellow that's about to be hanged.'

"Yes. How can *we* help him?"

"Mehaul, I must help him."

"What have we got to do with him?"

"Everything—at least, I have. And you, too."

"How?"

"Whisper, Mehaul. That pistol, you know."

'Yes."

"That pistol was his."

"No, 'twas yours."

"No, his; he gave it to me.'

"Tare an' agers, where did you meet him?"

"On the mail-coach; and you met him, too, and set his broken arm."

"Tundher an' turf! Watt, you don't say," said Mehaul, stopping short and clutching him by the arm, "that that's the young fellow that was hurt."

"The same. And they have found his pistol; and, however they came to find it out, discovered it was his. They have set him down for using it."

"That's awful, Watt," said Mehaul wiping his forehead as the drops of perspiration burst through it; "his blood'll be on our heads."

"That's exactly what I'm thinkin'. We must save him if we can."

"To be sure, if we can; but how? Mother ov Heaven! I don't mind fightin' fair; an' these bloody villains desarved what they got. But I'd never rest an aisy hour if this young fellow wor to suffer for what I—— What's to be done, Watt? Spake quick—what's to be done?"

"This, Mehaul: we must see Colonel Victor. He was going there on a visit. That pistol was, in truth, a present from the Colonel to him. We must see him—tell him all about it. Tell him that they are hanging an innocent man."

"An' put ourselves once agen in his place? Well, even so——"

"Certainly not. But, whatever the risks, it must be done."

"Heaven an' earth! to be sure it must. Merciful Providence! to think of his being brought into trouble by—— But, what's that, Watt?"

"What's what?"

"Isn't that the tramp of horses?"

"So it is. What brings them here? I thought we were far away from the highway."

"So I thought too. We must have gone astray in the darkness. Where are we, Shaymus, do you know?"

"I do. That's the high road outside the hedge."

"Tundher and turf, so it is," said Mehaul, glancing in affright across through the high bushes that bordered it. "May the divil fly away with you for an omadhawn! why did you not tell us that afore? Anyhow, lie down inside here."

"What are those fellows up to so far from their barracks?" asked Watt in a whisper.

"What are they up to—purshuin to their sowls—but murdher and robbery. Lie down here and wait 'till they pass."

Lying down inside the hedge they waited the approach of the cavalcade, who came forward at a disorderly trot.

As they came near, Mehaul could not avoid standing up and, crouching under the bushes, peeping out through the interstices at the approaching horsemen. A breathless silence fell on the hiders, and save the beating of their breasts no other sound broke on their waiting. Nearer and nearer came the tread of the horses; nearer and nearer, until the oaths and exclamations of the soldiers came on his hearing distinctly, accompanied also, it seemed to Watt, as he lay with his sense of hearing strained to the utmost tension—by the sound of a woman's voice.

In a moment more the horsemen had turned the sharp corner of the road facing them, and had come into view, such view as the uncertain cloud-covered moon showed.

Almost immediately, as they came within range of vision, Watt, who had been listening attentively, felt a touch on his shoulder. He started.

"Watt!" The whisper came with such significance on his ear that it at once aroused his quick attention. "Stand up beside me an' look."

In an instant Watt was on his feet beside him, peering through the bushes. A squadron of horsemen were galloping along rapidly, but in a rather disorderly manner. But Watt's eye fell on a figure in plain clothes among them, bearing before him on the crupper of his saddle a female form. That form was muffled up in a cloak, and they could not of course make out her features. In a moment, with great clatter and noise, they had swept past.

"That's very strange," said Watt, after they had passed, and whilst he and Mehaul, gazed at one another in some surprise.

"It is," said Mehaul, slowly.

"That's some girl—God help her!—they are bringing among them."

"You may well say 'God help her,'" said Mehaul. "That fellow that was with her couldn't be——"

"I was just thinking that. Though I did not recognise him, yet, by some strange feeling, I thought it was he."

"And I am sure ov id. It's him and no other. Earth an' says! what brought him out to-night?"

"I don't know," said Watt gravely, "and that reminds me to ask you now what I had not time to ask previously. How are they at Knock-na-Raheen?"

"They are well. Grace is well. But I'll tell you all another time. You forget the hurry we're in."

"No, I don't. But you can tell me as we go along. This incident, curiously enough, has set me athinking about them. Come along. We cannot go quick enough."

Turning away from the high road, they once more deflected into the fields, and struck across the country, Shaymus parting with them to make his way towards his own home, whilst they proceeded on their mission.

It was a long and weary march through the night across hill and dale, over bush and hedge and briar. But Watt felt it not. During the walk he learnt for the first time all the events that had happened during his imprisonment—the hangings, scourgings, picketings and outrages committed by the soldiery. Here, it was a house burned at night, whilst the startled inmates fled for their lives to the shelter of the neighbouring woods; there, it was a young man summarily caught up from his work and bayoneted or half hanged. Another time it was some old man found brutally murdered by the road side after the North Cork had passed. Oftener still, however, it was helpless young girls that had suffered at their hands.

But whilst Watt's blood boiled at the recital of these outrages on his unoffending countrymen, a deeper interest attached to the tale heard of Knock-na-Raheen. For the first time he learned of Grace's illness; for the first time also, he learned that the projected match was likely to be broken off. And for the first time also he learned how deeply the old love had burned itself into the fair girl's heart; and how nor time nor unfavourable circumstances, nor unworthy reports had been able to extinguish it, and that it burned as brightly for him now as before.

His heart leaped with joyous emotion. A new hope brightened in it. The old dream of love and happiness burst

into light once more in his breast ; and it seemed to him as if in escaping from his late dangers he had entered at once the fairy realms of love and romance.

Once more the future seemed to him full of brightness and glory. The handsome face of Grace Cottrell made the night bright with its radiance as he hurried along, his excited thoughts carrying him forward. Old reminiscences of love passages that he thought for ever stamped out from his mind came back with strong and renewed force.

A rush of delightful feelings came through his breast, and his vigorous pace answered to the rush of renewed hope in his heart.

" Mehaul, I should like to see her," he said, after a long endurance of silent walking, " I often thought when in prison that I would trample all memory of her out of my mind ; and heaven knows I tried, but I found it impossible. We must go there at once, after this present errand is finished."

To which Mehaul made no reply. He was too busy thinking, and perhaps he had not heard it ; or, perhaps again, he had. But he did not answer ; and with their minds filled with strangely divergent thoughts they bore forward in the direction of Colonel Victor's without stay or speaking.

The dawn broke as they climbed the small hill at Dunbeg. The sky in the west was changing from a cold grey into a bright crimson, that foreshadowed the morning. White banks of clouds, whose edges were tinted with a golden-red, massed themselves above the horizon. Underneath these the long, level, faint rays of coming day lit up by degrees the Irish Channel in the far distance, and extending over the spreading fields of Wexford, tipped the ground at their feet with the pale glory of dawn. The airy mists of the night still encircled the hill when they took their seats ; but the ever-advancing rays of the rising sun were gradually piercing those mists, and turning their grey lightness into an aureole of broken golden rays !

CHAPTER XXI.

KILBREMMER.

COLONEL VICTOR'S mansion stood on the side of a hill, sloping to the sun. Its many-windowed front looked southward and afar over the intervening spaces of wood and valley, to where, like a dulled rim of silver, the Atlantic Ocean formed the horizon. To the north it was protected from the rude blasts of winter by the high ground on the slope of which it stood; whilst to the west, when the Blackstairs, for once changing their name, became white with the snow of January, and sent their cold blasts of wind over the plain, searching and biting, a thick grove of trees, something more than a mile in depth and half a mile in width, gave shelter and comfort.

The owner had come into possession of the castle by successional right of a very old Wexford family. His possessions, by the changing circumstances of years and generations, had diminished considerably, but they were still ample. The Colonel's earlier years had been passed in the service of the British army, and now, with the snows of seventy years whitening on his head, he was ready with stories of half a century before, when his beardless face was darkened with the powder of a hundred guns smoking on the fields of Flanders, or when his arm first drew sword in battle, when the British Hussars broke the power of the French army at Hanno.

After a life of very active service he retired from the army with the title of Colonel, and shortly after married a sister of Lord Carhampton, at present the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. This lady had died when her children were young, and there now remained to the Colonel but two girls, just growing into their twentieth and twenty-first years.

If the days of his early manhood were bright with high-spirited adventure, and passed among gay companions, his declining years were not less agreeable, though in a different way.

Possessed, as we have said, of easy means, his generosity of character and his off-hand kindliness among the people—

in sad contrast with that of his compeers through the county —had won the warmest feeling and good wishes of the peasantry. His name was respected everywhere, and his two girls, whether they attended a country ball or rode through the winding paths by the Slaney, were everywhere received with the warmest welcome that their handsome faces, bright spirits, and good-natured ways deserved. The blessings of the country people followed them everywhere; and the universal respect shewn them testified to the regard in which they were held.

The Colonel was therefore, in quiet happiness, travelling down the slope of life's decline, when the rumours of disturbance began to break in on his household.

At first they were merely rumours, because the county of Wexford remained perfectly peaceable. There were floggings and outrages, and secret societies elsewhere, but by name only were they known in Wexford—they had no existence there. By degrees, however, this happy state of things passed away. Outrages, under the guiding genius of the local yeomanry and the imported troops, grew rapidly in many parts of the country—to be followed by the prompt extension of secret societies. In truth, the former made the latter almost necessary. When were the people to join hand in hand if it were not to protect themselves against ruin and murder, the musket, the torch and triangle, that visited them in the night at their own doors, and at a time, too, when the outstretched hand of their brethren throughout Ireland called to them to unite once more for independence?

It was therefore with considerable pain that Colonel Victor saw the shadow of trouble and insurrection throwing its darkening form over the land, and the spirit of midnight-burning and incendiarism flinging its lurid light in advance over Wexford.

With one hand he sought to restrain the rough dragooning of the yoemanry and the North Cork, whilst with the other he endeavoured to keep the peasantry from illegal associations. As might be expected, he failed in both. Every morning brought news of some house fired during the night, of some haggard where only the blackened remnants remained; every evening brought strange mysterious stories of meetings among the peasantry, of secreted loads of arms, of young

woods thinned to provide ashen handles for the pikes, of which it was said huge quantities were in existence.

The Colonel was seated at breakfast with his daughters—they were preparing for a long ride into Wexford—when the slanting rays of the rising sun across the streak of Irish sea came to dissipate the mists on the hill where Watt o' the Crosses and Mehaul had taken their rest, and to throw on the parlour windows a halo of golden glory.

"So far as I can see, Kate," Colonel Victor said, addressing his daughter, "I think it would be wiser to leave Ireland altogether for some time until things settle down."

"Where would you go, father?"

"To London. We can do no good here. I could at one time have checked these outrages. I cannot now."

"They only appear to be increasing."

"Yes, most causelessly and wantonly. With no purpose on earth to serve except the foul spirit of wanton cruelty or murder."

"What prompts them to it?"

"I don't know that they are prompted, Kate. Unfortunately, when the power to wreak ruin and wrong is given into men's hands they seldom hesitate to use it."

"But why should it be given now more than at any other time, father?"

"That is a question, Kate, I cannot answer. I only know that my remonstrances are treated in Dublin with but scant attention. There is not even a court-martial or any inquiry held."

"I pity the unfortunate people, father. They are so dreadfully wronged. And the horrors of suspense they suffer is almost worse than the reality. It was only yesterday Nisthaus Connor, who lives at Knock-na-Raheen, told us, as we were riding past, that for weeks few of the people have had the shelter of a house. They hide in the fields lest the houses might be burned over their heads."

"That's exactly the condition of things, Kate, my dear," said the Colonel, pushing his chair away from the table, "and that cannot last long. Wherefore, as we have no business here, and can side with neither party in the quarrel, I shall leave this house in charge of the servants, and leave for England as soon as I complete arrangements."

"I think you are right, father. It would be impossible to countenance the cruelties inflicted on these unoffending people," said the younger sister.

"It would; and of course it would be equally impossible to side with any infuriated attempts by the people against the Government. Nothing can justify disloyalty or insurrection."

"The lot of the people seems to be cast in unhappy lines," said Kate, with rather a droll smile wreathing her handsome face as she thought of the illogical nature of her father's statement, "if they are compelled to endure these outrages and forbidden to resist their oppressors. If I were a man I should not care to agree to that doctrine."

"Well, we have not time to discuss the ethics of the matter, Kate, my dear," said the Colonel, smiling back in response to his daughter, "particularly as we have to go to Wexford. You had better get ready."

"What horses do you wish us to take?" asked the daughter, as the Colonel stood up.

"Choose for yourselves, girls," said the Colonel, as he brushed back his snowy hair from his forehead before a large mirror; "only bring me the whip—that coral-mounted one that young Churchington made me a present of last October in Dublin. I wonder he has not paid us a visit as he promised."

"It is very odd," said Kate, with something like a sigh, if such a melancholy thing could disturb the pleasant repose of her face; "and if you remember, father, he wrote saying that he was coming at Christmas, yet he did not turn up."

"It was a very severe Christmas," said the Colonel, "and Mr. Churchington may well have feared to pass so dreary a time in a country place, and away from the city. Though I think it was hardly that," thought the Colonel to himself, as he glanced at the faces of the two girls reflected from the mirror before him, the dark hair and white forehead of the one contrasting with the masses of auburn hair of the other —both peerless examples of their different styles of beauty.

"Why, then, should he have written? or, failing to come, why should he not have written to apologise? It seems to me a very singular thing."

"Well, girls, we have not time to think over that, either.

He has his own reasons for it, I daresay. Probably he was recalled back to England. Now, girls, get ready. Eh, Tom! what is it? What now?"

These latter words were addressed to the butler, whose presence at the door he saw reflected in the glass.

"What is it Tom? Be quick! We are in a hurry."

"Two men to see you, sir!" said the butler.

"To see me!" said the Colonel. "It is very early for any one to call."

"So it is, sir, and they want to see you in a hurry."

"I hope there is no bad news through the country this morning," said the Colonel. "Do you know them?"

"One of 'em, I do."

"Who is he, Tom?"

"Mehaul-na-Corriga."

"What, the smith?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'll see him at once. Tell Connor to get ready the brown mare for me and the two greys for the girls. Where is he?"

"In the study, sir, an' another wid 'im. And they say, sir, that there's not a minute to be lost, an' that it consarns yourself."

"Everything that concerns the people and that concerns law and order concerns me. In that sense he was right. In here, you say?"

"Yes, sir, in there."

Mehaul rose as the Colonel entered, and with him Watt.

"Well, Mehaul," said Colonel Victor, "you're out early. Is there anything amiss?"

"There is, yer honour, a great dale amiss. More'n I'd tell you from this to sunset. But it's not about that I came to spake."

"What, then?" said the Colonel glancing at him, as the words fell from Mehaul's lips with great solemnity, and a strange seriousness lit up his massive, swarthy, set features.

"Did you ever see this afore?" asked Mehaul suddenly.

"Did I ever see this before?" echoed the Colonel, as he took the pistol which Mehaul presented to him in his hands. "Certainly I did. I saw it within the last few days."

"How did it leave your hands?"

"Well, it is rather a curious question; but I shall answer

it all the more readily that I take it you would not come at this hour, and such a distance, to ask them without sufficient reason. It is an old heirloom, and I presented it to the young gentleman with much reluctance, and only because he seemed struck with its beauty. But I certainly felt rather indignant that it should pass his hands so lightly, for when I saw it a few days ago——"

"Yes."

"It was in the hands of an officer of the North Cork Militia."

"The red-faced carabuncled man?"

"Yes, I believe he answers to that description," said the Colonel, with a smile.

"Do you know where the young gentleman you gave it to is now?"

"I do not," said the Colonel. He promised to come on a visit at Christmas, and he failed, for some reason I am unaware of, as he has never written since."

"I'll tell you where he is then," said Mehaul, with a sudden gesture of angry vehemence that pretty well startled the Colonel.

The latter waited as Mehaul paused.

"Go on," he said. "For heaven's sake, go on; your manner even more than your words startles me."

"He is in Waxford Jail! Bound! More nor that—he is there on a charge of bein' a Croppy, and for murder! More nor that—he is goin' to be hung this mornin'."

"You must be dreaming!" said the Colonel, startled almost out of his senses by the news conveyed in these broken sentences as much as by the incoherent and vehement manner of the speaker.

"I'm not dramin'," said Mehaul, "though I might well be dramin' for the night I've spent. But I'm not, and I tell you now, Colonel Victor, if you want to save your friend's life—if you want to save an innocent life—you'll ride athout stop or stay to the town of Waxford, an' take him out ov their hands. Else he'll swing from the gallows-tree to-day afore a few hours more are over your head as sure as my name is Mehaul-na-Corriga or yours is Colonel Victor."

"How am I to believe this extraordinary story?" broke in the Colonel.

"An' what's more, Colonel Victor," continued Mehaul, not minding the interruption, "outside ov everything else, it's your bounden duty to do it. He is in a manner your guest. He was comin' here to you on a visit Christmas Eve when he got hurt. It was I set his broken arm; and it was I that shot the sojer he's goin' to be hanged for!"

"You!" said the Colonel, starting back in astonishment.

"I. No other," said Mehaul, and thereupon, with as much rapidity as he could, he related the story of his visit to the wounded traveller, and his escape from the raiding soldiers on his return.

"And if you want to know if I'm telling the truth, Colonel Victor—though it's little raison you have for doubtin' anything I'd say—here's wan beside me that can tell you more."

"I have no reason to doubt you, Mehaul. Although your story is a strange one——"

"Strange as it is, it is true—perfectly true," said Watt, breaking in. "And as there is but little time to be lost, if the young gentleman's life is to be saved, I'll tell you in a few words how the pistol came to pass from his possession and into mine."

A few nervous sentences put the Colonel into possession of all that happened between the two travellers on that memorable Christmas Eve.

"And so he was coming here at the time of his accident?" said the Colonel.

"Exactly as I have told you," said Watt.

"I wonder he did not send us word of his hurt," said the Colonel, wonderingly.

"I don't suppose he cared to turn up in the light of a patient; or, perhaps for some other reason," said Watt; "but," added he, hurriedly, "whilst we are talking, the sands of his life may be running out."

"True," said the Colonel, hastily rising. "Of course you will come with me to Wexford. Your information will be of great assistance."

"No, Colonel Victor," said Mehaul, with a grin arising on his heavy features, "I don't think if *we* went there, even your power could get us out."

"Very well, in that case I'd better ride there at once. Indeed I was going there to-day on very different business.'

"If you don't make all the haste you can, they'll hang him as sure as they hung Sir Edward Crosbie in Carlow," said Mehaul, "an' that afore the sun is much higher in the sky."

Stirred into activity by this startling remark, the Colonel bade his visitors good-bye, and was soon, with his two daughters, equipped, and all in their saddles for Wexford!

CHAPTER XXII.

GRACE'S ABDUCTION.

THE two men struck across the fields towards the forge of Clohogue, some miles distant. Both were anxious to see the place again for many reasons, but Watt, in especial, for the purpose of seeing Grace Cottrell. A new feeling of hope had struck up in his heart; and the beauty of the summer's morning, the gleam of the river, the blue outline of the mountains, the soft light on the sleeping meadows, from which the dew had not yet vanished, brought happy feelings and associations into his head, and sent a pulsation of the old love through him.

There was not a bright reflection of the sunbeams in the river that did not recall the brightness of her smile, and the blue of the sleeping mist-crowned hills did not seem half so blue as her eyes.

In short, the old feelings, the old love that had been in his heart during his four years' campaigning, was as fresh as it ever was. There was no thought, nor room for thought, of repulse or disappointment. All coldness and indifference was forgotten, and only the fair face of his early love, full of welcome and warmth, presented itself to him.

The sun was high in the sky, after some hours' quick walking across meadows and cornfields and hedges, when they came to the grove mentioned in the early part of the story, where Watt had met Grace Cottrell on her return from Mass on Christmas morning.

Resolving to rest themselves there awhile in its cool shadow, after their heated walk, they deflected into the path that led through it.

As they were entering, a form, sitting on the stump of a tree, with bandaged arm, presented itself to their view.

Mehaul and his companion drew back involuntarily, for, knowing that search would probably be made for them, they wished to be seen by as few people as possible. The noise they made, however, arrested the attention of the form, who quickly looked up.

"Why, it's Murrough!" said Mehaul, in high delight, as he recognised the form.

"The very man of all others we want to see," said Watt, advancing to shake hands.

"I was down at the forge lookin' for you, Mehaul," said Murrough.

"Well, I wasn't there; but I'm here now," said Mehaul cheerfully. "What do you want wid me?"

"To tell you the news from Raheen!"

"The news from Raheen!" said Mehaul, sharply as he turned his eyes full on the speaker's face, as, indeed, did also Watt, on whom the intelligence had double effect. "The news from Raheen—what news?"

"The place was burned last night afore I came home."

"Burned! Merciful God!" said Mehaul, in the extremity of surprise.

"Burned!" echoed Watt. Upon his heart the news struck with the coldness of dismay, and a forebodement of coming sorrow and danger.

"Was the whole place burned?" asked Mehaul, after a minute's pause.

"No. The people gathered and put it out. But that's not the worst of the news."

"Not the worst," said Mehaul. "There was nobody flogged or shot—was there?"

"No."

"Well, Murrough, an' will you tell us what's the——"

"Miss Grace is gone!"

"What?" said Watt, now for the first time interfering in the conversation. "Miss Grace gone! Gone where? What do you mean?"

"She's not in the place, an' wasn't seen since last night."

"What's that you say?" asked Watt in startled and

vehement surprise. "Grace gone! Gone where? Tell me all about it! Quick! Quick! or you will set me mad!"

"See, Murrough," said Mehaul, as he glanced at the stupefied expression of Murrough's face, occasioned by trouble, want of sleep, and the wounds he had received from the soldiers last night, and saw at once how little competent he was to explain the matter quickly, "sit down here an' take yer own time an' yer own way ov id, an' tell us what happened. From what you've just said this bates anything that has happened yet."

Murrough was pleased that he was allowed to tell it in his own way, for Watt's rapid questioning disconcerted him; wherefore, resuming his seat, he retailed to his alarmed and surprised hearers the astonishing news—how the glare of sudden light through the kitchen windows told to the affrighted eyes of the dwellers at the Knock that the back of the house was on fire; how they had, one and all, without a second's delay, rushed in that direction, and there found the roof in two places ablaze; how, while they were vigorously trying to extinguish it, a number of yeomen and soldiers burst into the house and commenced searching the premises; how soldiers and yeomen scattered themselves in searching parties everywhere; and how, to make a long story short, when they had all departed—when the fire, with much difficulty, had been extinguished after considerable harm, and when the confusion was in great measure over, it was found that the young mistress was nowhere to be found—that she was no longer in Raheen House.

To which surprising story—told with much digression and unnecessary detail—to which latter his impatient auditors lent but unwilling ear, there succeeded a pause of some seconds' duration.

"Gone!" said Watt, breaking the silence. "How could she have gone?"

"I don't know," said Murrough, in great distress. "I had not come back at the time."

"Was she searched for?" asked Watt. "Perhaps the burning and the soldiers frightened her and she hid somewhere."

Murrough shook his head in reply. There was no chance whatever of that being the case. Grace Cottrell was not at Raheen, nor within miles of it.

"Could the soldiers have taken her away?" Watt ponderingly asked. "Would thay have dared to——."

His heart was so filled to overflowing with wrath and revenge that he could not finish the question.

"I'll tell you what," said Mehaul, as he thought for a second, "I see how it is. She has been taken away. An' I'll make it plain to you who's at the beginnin' an' end ov id all. 'Torney Gordon was there yesterday, you say?"

"He was."

"An' he saw Miss Grace?"

"Yes."

"An' he left in a bad temper?"

"Yes, I saw him myself."

"An' it's purty well known that Miss Grace was inclined to give him the cowld shouldher of late."

"So it was," said Murrough.

"Now, that bein' so, it's my opinion—an' I'm sure I'm right—that it's Birchwood Gordon that is at the foot ov this work. It was he brought the sojers here. He has friends among their officers that 'ud do that much for him—even if they wouldn't be only too ready to do id for the sake of the villainy itself. It's he that has got her carried off. An' heaven help the poor girl that gets into his hands—that's all I say."

"This is awful news. What is to be done? For whatever is to be done must be done quickly," said Watt in a frenzy of trouble and impatience.

"Stay a bit. Let us think over id," said Mehaul, quietly thinking. "It's he has got her and carried her off. I'm as shure ov that as the right hand is on my body. Now, the next point is, where did he get her carried to? An' that reminds me—d'ye remember meetin' the sojers last last night, Watt, near the turn ov Benduff?"

"I declare to heaven!" said Watt, his remembrance drawn to the incident, "it was the poor girl that was being——"

"It was, as shure as you're a livin' man," said Mehaul.

"Would to God I had known that!" said Watt in a burst of agony.

"Ay," said the smith, as he pulled from his breast the long dagger, "or, if I had, I'll be sworn this good knife would

have searched out some of their hearts before they had brought her with them."

"What shall we do, Mehaul? We cannot sit here in this cruel state of things. Every minute is a matter of life or death—or worse. Shall we go to Wexford?"

"What to do there?" said Mehaul.

"To rescue this poor girl from their hands. To protect her when there is no one else to do it. To tear her from their power wherever they are."

Watt spoke in words of frenzied vehemence.

"That won't do, Watt," said Mehaul with solid quietness. "*You* can't go into the town of Waxford; nor I aither, for the matther ov that. There is nothing there for you but your ould cell in the prison again."

"And what are we to do? Are we to sit here, not knowing what fate may be awaiting this young lady? Are we to leave her beauty, and her winsomeness, and her innocence to the mercy of a brutal soldiery, or what mayhap is worse, to the protection of a rich scoundrel? Nay," said he, his anger boiling to red heat at the thought, "if I were to suffer or to risk the worst punishments at their hands they can devise, I will try to release her, alone and unaided, if need be."

He rose from where he had been seated as he spoke; and as his manly form, full of life and energy, stood before Mehaul, the latter could not refuse giving a look of admiration in his quiet and solemn way.

"Well, Watt, you need not spake ov goin' by yourself," he said, "for as much as you care for Miss Grace, I care as much, an' more. An' if I had once guessed that it was she—as I am sure it was—that they wor a-carryin' off last night, I tell *you* that Mehaul-na-Corriga would be lyin' a lifeless corpse in the ditch of Benduff this mornin' afore I would ha' allowed id."

"I know that, Mehaul. I know that, old friend. No one knows better than I do your bravery and faithfulness," said Watt, softening, and taking the extended hand of the other in his grasp. "But this is a time for action and not for thinking. I tell you again, I am on the horns of the cruellest torture until I am doing something."

"I know, I know, Watt. But there is no use rushing

headlong into danger athout seein' aforehand you're doin' somethin' that may be ov use. Now, I've a notion in my head."

"Yes, yes, what is it?" asked Watt, impatiently. "Don't delay us, Mehaul, for I am not in a humour, even from an old friend like yourself, to stand much thwarting or delay at present."

"No, nor I'm not goin' to give you much delay. But what I propose is this:—In the Forge of Clohogue, where you wouldn't expect to find 'em—nor you needn't ask me how they kem there, nor what brought 'em there—you'll find some sojers' uniforms. They wor never worn afore, so you needn't be afeard ov wearin' 'em. If the three ov us 'll put them on, and disguise ourselves a little, we may go as soon as it's dusk into Waxford, and sorra wan 'll be the wiser. It's so full of sojers comin' fresh into id every day that one of 'em there dosn't know his brother if he met him."

"But they are well guarded; and the watchword?" suggested Watt, impatiently.

"Bless your sowl, I know the watchwords for a week to come. An' if I didn't, I know a house not far from the town where I can learn 'em aisy enough, in coorse they happen to be changed. Are you agreed to that?"

Agreed! Of course they were agreed. Agreed to anything that promised speedy action. Wherefore, with little further consideration, they were speedily on their way to Clohogue.

Arrived at the forge they soon found Mehaul's words to be true. That establishment, in times not long past musical with the noise of hammering strokes on the anvil, and all alight with the circling sparks flung out from under the hammer's clink, was now cold and silent. The idle gossipers, on work or conversation intent, were absent. It was a time when no one with any regard to their personal safety could be away from their own homes. The roads, and even the neighbourhood, were desolate, as a war-trampled country.

"There they are," said the blacksmith, as after a few minutes' delving with an iron crowbar, he uplifted a square wooden box, carefully cased in oilcloth, whence

he took three soldiers' uniforms; after which he carefully replaced the box, with its contents, tramping the earth around it, and profusely covering the space above with such fragments of old iron, old wheel rims, broken ploughs and hammers, as are the usual odds and ends of a country forge.

"Try these on," said Mehaul, as he glanced at them. "I shall go to my house an' bring over some refreshments. We are all in need ov 'em. You not need fear the sojers. They are not likely to stay longer about here nor they can help. I won't be long away."

If he were twice as long away, his absence, under the circumstances, would not be missed. For, as Murrough proceeded to detail the circumstances that arose at the Raheen house since Christmas Day, Watt was supplied with food for thought sufficient to make the hours seem short as minutes. From Grace's sudden attack of illness—the wherefore Watt guessed with ready instinct—down to the meeting with Birchwood Gordon yesterday and the raid of soldiers last night, he had the whole incidents of the time that passed whilst he lay a prisoner in Wexford barracks minutely photographed before him. And with each narration and with each successive incident, his heart, even under the unpleasant circumstances, bounded in his breast.

"I knew Grace would be true," he thought triumphantly, forgetting his late despondency and reckless carelessness. "I knew the bright thoughts, the old love, would grow afresh in the dear girl's heart. God bless her for it! Not all the ruffians in the British service—and heaven knows they are plenty enough—can keep her from me. I wish Mehaul were here. Anything for speedy action."

Mehaul was not long in returning. He had, short as was his stay away, brought back plenty of news to interest them if their minds were less occupied than they were at present. In the first place, the soldiers had made diligent search all the morning in the neighbourhood. In the second place, he learned that some gossiping wanderer in the night, hiding behind whin hedges, had seen the raiding soldiers, and had seen in their midst Mr. Birchwood Gordon—bearing out the conclusion they had already arrived at. And further, he had provided a car wherewith, when it became a little later,

they could, by certain and unfrequented ways, come within easy reach of the town of Wexford.

In addition to which news, and forming no unwelcome portion of his return visit, he bore with him ample provision in the shape of bread and cold chicken and whiskey, which the long unappeased appetites of all hands made doubly welcome to them. In the shadow of the forge bellows, with the bright light of the summer noon peeping in at them through the open door and back window, they discussed these refreshments, and prepared for their evening visit to Wexford—Watt o' the Crosses all the time in a state of impatience and evil forebodement not to be described.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SEARCHING FOR GRACE.

THE shadows of evening saw the three friends in martial uniform, and driven by a driver with whom we have heretofore made acquaintance—Shaymus Morrissey—on their way to Wexford.

It was not uncommon to see soldiers thus driving through the country, so that nothing unusual appertained to it; but inasmuch as from time to time the incensed and enraged peasantry took the law, as the phrase goes, into their own hands and retaliated for the sufferings they themselves had undergone, the drive was by no means free from danger.

Without being questioned or interfered with they reached the same house in which they had exchanged clothes the previous evening, and there they dismounted. There, also, the carman put up his yoke.

Inquiries here, as they soon found, were useless. The hostess, a secret ally of the Wexford United Irishmen, had heard nothing of the object of the search on which their hearts were set. Plenty of extraordinary rumours of the events of the previous night she had to tell—far and away removed, however, from the real truth—but as these were better known to themselves than to anyone else, they cared but little to listen to them. One word that could give them

an idea of the present whereabouts of the abducted girl would be worth a thousand inconsequential fragments of gossip.

Having warmed themselves with a measure of warm liquor, much needed after their long drive, they resolved to separate and walk through the town, and, returning after the lapse of an hour or two, report what they had learned.

Watt, in his impatience to be doing something, was the first to leave. Each moment that he remained inactive seemed to him to be centuries long, during which the most frightful scenes conjured up themselves to his mind.

Depositing within his breast the knife with which Mehaul had provided him, and placing in his pocket, for ready use, the pistol consigned to his keeping, he stepped out into the streets.

As on the previous night, the chief feature in the darkened streetways was the number of soldiers moving about. Here and there, from the windows of hotels and public bars, the light gleamed on the streets, flinging its faint rays on the uneven pathway ; and in these invariably, as before, a crowd of drunken and squabbling soldiers stood in confused multitude.

Into these he turned occasionally to take a drink and listen to the conversation. Occasionally also to take a treat or exchange one with some of his brothers in uniform, without detection, but without also finding anything to give him a clue to the information he wanted.

For an hour or more he thus wandered hopelessly about. To search for the proverbial needle would indeed have been an easy task to the one which he had set himself. To find out in a town overrun with drunken soldiers where he had been but the day before an escaped prisoner, and where any moment might bring detection on himself, any trace of his abducted love was indeed a hopeless task. So his feet were weary and his heart torn with bitter pain and disappointment when he moodily resolved to seek the appointed trysting-place with his friends.

He had by this time, in the course of his uncertain and pointless wanderings, come immediately opposite the door of the house beside the barracks, which had been so lately his hiding-place.

He raised his eyes as he did so to look at the door where

the friendly hand of his old comrade had plucked him into safety.

"If ——"

He was going to say, "If Dick na Raheen were here now," when suddenly his attention was attracted to two men in the darkness, talking by the angle of the barrack-wall. Dark as it was, however, his eager eyes perceived that one of them was an officer, whose gestures he thought he somewhat knew; and at the same moment he perceived that the other was a civilian, and whose appearance, in some indefinite way, also seemed not unfamiliar to him.

He had no time, however, to analyse these strange feelings that indicated recognition, nor to know how it was that they did so, for in a hurried impulse of the moment, prompted he knew not by what, he stepped rapidly into the angle formed by the connection of the barrack and the front wall of the receding house, and there breathlessly listened to the rather loud voices of the speakers.

"I say again," said one of the two, in rather an angry voice, "you should not have gone there. You had no business—no right or concern to go there."

"I know that voice," thought the listener to himself.

"I am not so certain you had any business there yourself," was the rather insolent reply.

"I know that voice also," was the thought that arose to the listener.

"You had not. You know you had not. It was ungentlemanly and indelicate."

"As to the indelicacy, my good sir," said the other sneeringly, "I think the balance of that lies on your side. Who suggested taking her away at all? That, too, I suppose will be left to the credit of the North Cork men?"

"If I did, you know perfectly well why I did so, if it were only to revenge myself on him whom you, to the discredit of your position, allowed to escape——"

"Oh, if that be all," said the other, with a mocking laugh, "I think I have as much cause for revenge on my side as you have. These marks have not quite disappeared from my face yet."

"It appears so—that is clear enough."

"Is it!" said the other, with a sudden burst of passion

as if the innuendo had struck him in rather a tender spot. "Well, perhaps it is, but it has arisen also from your suggestion and, perhaps, as I have suffered in that respect by your counsels, I may profit by them in another way. I ——"

"In what way?"

"Why, I am as good a judge and as great an admirer of a pretty face as you are; and, from what I can see, as likely to be accepted as you are. Our friend the escaped Colonel, appears even yet to hold her fancies. As he is not likely to plead his cause before her for some time ——"

"See, Colonel Needham, I do not want to bandy words with you, at least in this case, or now. I warn you——"

The speaker paused.

"Yes, you warn me," said the other mockingly, "of what?"

"To pay no more visits to the quarter I mention, or——"

"Or what?"

"You will answer to me for it, and that promptly and publicly. That is quite enough for the present."

The speaker, as he said so, turned on his heel, walked quickly from his companion, almost brushing past Watt where he stood in hiding.

"I did not know you were a fire-eater," laughed the other, "but ——"

What further he was going to say did not pass his lips, for before he had time to speak the words the other had passed out of hearing. And after a few seconds he turned on his heel and walked towards the barrack-gate.

As soon as he did so, Watt, who was all impatience to follow the first speaker, stepped out from his hiding place after him. He felt he now had by a fortunate chance got the clue to the whereabouts of his abducted love. His breast was tortured by the conversation he had just heard. His old love, the beautiful, the gentle, the innocent Grace Cottrell, to be the subject for contention between two villains! His fingers quivered as they touched the dagger in his breast; and with revenge setting his brain on fire, though without any definite purpose or intention, he pursued with quick footsteps the form before him.

That figure must have been quickened by thoughts nearly as angry as those which possessed his own breast, for he walked with singularly rapid and hastening speeed.

But the pace of Watt o' the Crosses kept equal with his, sometimes almost disappearing in the darkness of an unlit portion of the street, again thrown into palpable recognition by the bright light of a shop window, when it fell for a moment on him as he speedily passed, and anon vanishing around a narrow corner and for a moment lost to view, the former with the unerring, untiring trail of the sleuthhound, followed unobserved on his track.

The lights of the town had died out; the shops, if there were any in the way, had closed up their shutters for the night and disappeared, and the streets were pitch-dark, when, all of a sudden, the latter stopped before a large and tenantless-looking house. Tenantless-looking, for no light gleamed from any of its windows.

As he fumbled for the latch-key Watt quickened his steps, and by the time he had opened the door he stood beside him.

"Who are you?" asked the gentleman, abruptly.

"A messenger from Colonel Needham."

"What about?"

"I shall tell you inside."

They entered.

A light, a dim light, was burning in an interior apartment. Thither the gentleman led him.

"Now, what do you want, and what message have you?" he asked abruptly, as he turned up the light into a bright glare.

"You are Mr. Birchwood Gordon?" asked Watt.

"Why, I should say you know that already," said the former carelessly. "But stay!" added he in sudden alarm, as his eyes fell on his questioner's face." Who are you, and what brought you here?"

"I came here on a message that concerns you, and concerns me, and concerns others, Mr. Gordon. I see by the glance of your eyes that you recognize me."

"What—what do you want?" asked Mr. Gordon, in startled and disconcerted tones.

"It is useless to ask this question. You know well what I want. Now, I have not long to delay—don't stir hand or foot, or I shall shoot you dead at my feet!—and therefore have no time to waste words in parleying. You have done me

evil and injury for the past four years. You have belied me, scandalized me, made my name—pure and stainless as any on Ireland's ground—a by-word even among my own people."

The gentleman standing opposite to him made a frightened gesture of dissent.

"Don't interrupt me, and don't shift your hand; for if you do, as God is above me, I shall leave you dead where you stand. You have done all these, I say. I now forgive them all—give a clear acquittance of them—only restore to me, restore to my arms, that innocent girl you have taken from her home."

"I know nothing of her—I had nothing to do with it," said Mr. Gordon, letting his eyes fall uneasily as he met the stern and impassioned gaze of the other.

"That's false—and you know it! But I have not time now to listen to your lying denials. For four years you have placed me under ban as a murderer. Unless you tell me at once where you have this poor girl concealed—unless you bring me at once to that place—and place her in my hands free and unstained—I tell you once for all and for the last time, I shall earn the name once again, and deservedly this time. Where is she?"

"I know not."

"I give you while I count three," said Watt, as his eyes flashed with fury and his fingers trembled nervously on the stock of his pistol. "Give me the information. It is your last chance in the world. One!"

"I pledge you my honour I don't know since the afternoon."

"*Your* honour," hissed Watt, who now, seeing that the other was determined to give him no information, felt sure that she was in the house, and that therefore there was no time to be lost. "Two!"

His pistol, now held openly in his hand, reflected on its polished steel barrel the rays of the lamp with strange effect.

As he paused after repeating the last word, and his opponent stood stock still, apparently unable to move or stir or speak, save to repeat the same denial, it seened to him as if the moments had changed into hours, so full of concentrated passion and intense anxiety were the fleeting sands of time.

'Villain that you are I still give you a chance for your life. One word but to say where she is. One word. Nay, by the heavens if you stir your hand——"

A burst at the door sudden and unexpected, caused him for a second's space to turn his head. Short as it was, however, it gave occasion to his opponent to snatch a pistol and fire at him. A short, sharp, quick throb of pain along his side, as if a needle had stung him, aroused Watt's attention even before he heard the report. In the tenth part of a second he was once again facing his assailant, who in the smoke of the pistol shot, was crouching back against the wall. With an imprecation of pain, and rage, and disappointed hope, he lifted his right hand——

The light leaped from out his eyes, the nerves and muscles of his brain and body relaxed their strength, as a heavy blow descended on his head; and under its deadening influence he fell heavily on the floor.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE RIDE FOR LIFE.

Colonel Victor and his two daughters were speedily on their way to Wexford.

The long ride was shortened considerably by their anxiety to save the life of their acquaintance, and also by the conversation that occurred as they went swiftly forward as to the curious circumstances that had been related to them that morning.

Why had Charles Churchington, for so it now appeared for the first time was Watt's airy young fellow-traveller of Christmas Eve called, never sent them word of his accident? Why had he lain ill for some months so near them without acquainting them of his neighbourhood; and why, even that being so, should he not have sent them a message even of the scantiest character, that his life was in peril! On such a charge too.

But these questionings, if they served to make the time pass more swiftly, threw but little light on the subject.

Rather it served to embarrass and perplex them the more; and so in a state of mind excited with the danger attaching to their friend, and amazed by his proceedings, they reached the town of Wexford.

It was early when, with the steeds blown by their heated ride, and their manes smoking with foam, they pulled up at the offices of the General-commanding, in the barrack-square.

As they rode past, indications of something unusual about to occur appeared on every side. Over against that portion of the barrack-wall whence Watt some weeks since made his unceremonious escape, the appearances were sinister enough in themselves to attract attention.

A large dray, standing upright on its rear shafts, met their gaze, from the chain of which a small noose depended some eight or ten feet from the ground. To the Colonel's eyes the apparition was plain enough in its self-explanation; but the young ladies glanced at it with unconcern, not taking heed of its meaning.

Larger groups of soldiers than usually were on duty, fully accoutred, stood around with a holiday air, as if some pageant were about to be performed; and these it was that struck the hearts of the young girls with awe and trembling. Not heeding, and indeed averting his eyes from their paled cheeks and timid, frightened eyes, the Colonel, slightly in advance, quickly descended from his horse, and rapped at the General's door.

To his extreme surprise and terror, he learned from the soldier servant that the General had gone to visit the fort of Duncannon, now being rapidly placed in a state of repair and defence, and would not be back till the afternoon. As he looked around at the preparations in the barrack-yard, his fear grew, in spite of himself, apace. And as he looked at his daughters he saw that their eyes reflected back his own looks of apprehension in a more heightened degree.

"Who is officer of the guard to-day?" he asked of the soldier.

"Colonel Needham."

"Where is he?"

"In the guardroom."

Directing the horses' heads in that direction he reached

the door, and was soon, whilst his daughters remained on horseback outside, within the apartment.

Colonel Needham was busily employed, but his business seemed to Colonel Victor's eyes rather a curious one. He was busy watching the contents of a pot placed over the barrack fire, the odours from which filled the room with a suffocating smell: in point of fact in the manufacture of that article well known in the ominous words "pitch cap." He had no time, however, to attend to this, or, indeed, to feel concern about it. His other cares were too pressing. Wherefore he at once addressed himself to that officer. The latter, recognising who was speaking to him, which in the rather foggy atmosphere of the room was not easy, promptly and politely recognised the rank of his visitor by immediately attending.

"I am glad to see you Colonel Victor. What gave us the honour of your visit thus early to-day? You have been lately but a rare visitor at the barracks."

"I come on rather a hurried errand. I came to see the General, and find him unfortunately absent."

"He is absent at present, and will be," said Colonel Needham, "for some hours. Can we supply his place in any way for you?"

"Well, I don't know. Perhaps you can. I came, in fact, on a hurried intimation that an execution was about to take place here this morning."

"True enough, so there is. But that is nothing unusual, my dear Colonel. The country is in a frightfully disturbed state. The law must be upheld at all hazards."

"But this is a different case, and a different matter altogether. This is an innocent person."

"I am surprised to hear *you* say that, Colonel Victor. Nobody ever *is* executed but—if you take his own word—an innocent man. But it is rather an odd thing, if you will permit me to say so, to see one of your position, my dear Colonel, who should be, and I have no doubt is, an upholder of the king's authority, coming here to say so."

"But he is. I am assured of it. I know it."

"I gravely doubt that—that is, I mean you must have been mistaken. You cannot know the prisoner."

"But I repeat it, I do," said the Colonel heatedly, as he

reflected that the time was running swiftly and purposelessly to waste. "He is an old friend of mine."

"I scarcely think so," said the other with a cool toss of his head.

"But, I repeat it, he is. Can I see him?"

"Quite impossible. It is now ten o'clock. He will be hanged at twelve. It is quite impossible you could see him. It is against the rules of the court-martial. Not, at any rate, until he is about to be executed."

"My God! that would be too late," said the Colonel, in an ecstacy of impatience.

"You need not trouble yourself about him, Colonel Victor. He has been tried and found guilty on the clearest evidence. The court-martial has so declared it. If you know him, he has simply imposed on you. How long do you know him?"

"Well not very long," said Colonel Victor, brought up very short by this query. "Well, not very long. I met him in Dublin."

"Exactly so."

"But he was coming down here on a visit to me at Christmas, when he met with the accident."

"Did he pay the visit?"

"No, he did not," said the Colonel, confusedly, as this unexplained matter was thus brought forth so prominently before him.

"No, nor was he likely to. The fact is, my dear Colonel, he was, we have found, one of these foreign agents—these foreign emissaries—hiding among the rebellious folk of the country and sheltered by them, and instigating them, in turn, into disaffection."

"I could not be induced to believe that. In truth, I believe to the contrary."

"Your belief, my dear Colonel, is not to the purpose. The decision of the court-martial rules the roost now. But even if you were here at the time you would find the evidence against him very hard to be got over."

"Evidence!"

"Quite so."

"Excepting the——"

"See, Colonel Victor, look at this."

The red-faced officer walked over to a press built in the wall, which he opened, took therefrom a beautifully mounted pistol which he showed to his visitor.

"Peacefully and loyally-inclined men are not now-a-days likely to be the bearers of weapons such as this. Look at it."

The Colonel looked at it. It was a magnificent weapon, as well for the superiority of its make as for the costly jewels which were crusted and inlaid on its stock. And the Colonel said so.

"It is beautiful, magnificent," said the officer of the North Cork Militia, echoing his words. "But there is something more. That weapon is French make. Furthermore, it has the initials 'N.'—Napoleon, evidently. And a present evidently. Now, loyal subjects of King George do not usually travel in disturbed, rebellious districts with such weapons as this, coming from such a source."

"There must be some mistake in this," said the Colonel, in a state of great anxiety and bewilderment.

"A rather sad mistake for him," said Colonel Needham with a significant look on his red face. "A mistake which I must say I hope a great many of his kind will come to."

"But surely the possession of an arm of this kind—outside of all other evidence—does not warrant the taking of his life."

"Quite sufficient if there were not. We who are interested in the preservation of law and authority have decided that. But it so happens there is."

"There is? How?"

"This man has been an assailant of a patrol of his Majesty's forces, in the night time, whereby, when in the discharge of their duty, one of them was shot down."

"That is not the case!"

"Not the case! Colonel Victor," said the red-faced officer remonstratingly.

"No. I have been this morning," said Colonel Victor, speaking rapidly and impassionedly, "made aware of that occurrence."

"You have, Colonel Victor," said the other, cynically. "I did not know you were so far in the secrets of the service; still less did I think you were in the secrets of the disaffected."

"The story as told to me would not reflect," said Colonel Victor, in a burst of hasty irritation at the insulting innuendo of the other's words, "much credit on his Majesty's forces, or rather on those who led them."

"No!" said the other, with insulting calmness. "Do you happen to know the officer's name?"

"I do not; but my informant" ——

"Yes, your informant?"

"My informant," continued Colonel Victor, "was a blacksmith whom I know well and can trust—trust implicitly. It was he who, flying for his life from the soldiers whose conduct I hold to be unworthy of his Majesty's forces, did in self-defence shoot the unfortunate soldier."

The militia officer gave a long-drawn whistle, as much as to say—"Here's a revelation, truly."

At this juncture some officers of high standing, detailed for barrack duty during the day, entered the room.

"Here, gentlemen," said the red-faced Colonel, with a grin on his features on which the marks of the lash had not yet healed, or where they had healed had left red and white cicatrices behind, "here is Colonel Victor coming to bear witness on behalf of that interesting young gentleman who has been sentenced. Pray proceed, Colonel?"

The Colonel was taken aback a little at the turn circumstances had taken. He began to think that his advocacy had taken rather an unfavourable direction, and an uncomfortable impression was growing fast over him that in his warmth on behalf of his young friend he had been rather injuring than serving his cause. But he thought it better to proceed as he had commenced. Besides, his natural openness and frankness of character would have prevented him from attempting to hide or conceal anything, even if there were anything which he wished to conceal.

So, after shaking hands with the newcomers, he proceeded with his narrative in as few words as he could.

"That pistol was presented to him on Christmas Eve in exchange for one you showed me lately, by a French officer on his way home."

"That is rather a curious story, Colonel Victor," said Colonel Needham with a shrug of his shoulders that intimated as strongly as possible his doubt of the whole story, and his

belief that something else lay beneath it. "How did you come to learn these interesting particulars?"

"I was engaged telling you when these gentlemen arrived. Two men visited me at an early hour this morning. One of them was the man who used the pistol when it was lost, the other was the man who interchanged the pistol with my friend, your prisoner now."

"Stay, Colonel Victor, for a moment," said Colonel Needham. "Who were these two men?"

"I have already told you the name of the former. It is Mehaul-na-Corriga—otherwise Michael the Blacksmith. The other was a young man some years absent from the country——"

"In the French service?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"And until a few weeks since a prisoner here?"

"I am not aware of that. But it was he with whom my friend, your prisoner, exchanged the pistol most innocently."

"You seem to have most loyal acquaintances, if you will permit me to say so," said Colonel Needham, with a malignant smile, as he bethought him of his escaped prisoner, and the unmerciful flagelation to which he himself had been subjected by the latter.

"I don't quite understand your meaning," said the Colonel; "and as time is precious, I cannot waste it now in asking an explanation. Your General is absent. What I would ask is, that the execution be suspended until he returns, when I can see him. That is not, gentlemen," he said, appealingly, turning towards the new-come officers, "beyond your power. Remember, the life of an innocent man depends upon it."

"Colonel Needham was president of the court-martial, Colonel Victor," said one of the officers, who showed by their looks how glad they would have been to avail themselves of the power if they had it.

The Colonel's fine impassioned manner, his splendid appearance, his majestic figure, his snowy head, towering above the tallest of them, and the medals he bore on his breast for brave deeds on foreign fields, impressed them with the sense of his worth and his position. Perhaps also the knowledge of the hospitalities at Kilbremmer, and the sight

of the two graceful and handsome girls riding up and down outside impressed them considerably.

At any rate, the only unsympathetic face there was that of Colonel Needham, and he continued by saying—

"It so happens that I was president of the court-martial, and it also happens that I am in charge of the barracks to-day as senior officer here."

"I am glad to learn both," said Colonel Victor, with softened politeness, "because I know you will agree to my request. A few hours until the General's return cannot be of much moment to you. It is of awful importance to my young friend."

"My only regret in declining your request, sir," said Colonel Needham, "is that it should be proffered under the circumstances. It is not often that an officer, once of his Majesty's forces, comes to prefer a request on behalf of a convicted prisoner, strengthened by the suggestions and—and—advice of an escaped prisoner and a self-acknowledged rebel and assassin."

His manner, even more than his words, was so insulting that Colonel Victor, impressed as he was by the necessity, growing every moment more urgent, of making a final effort for the life of his young friend, could not help remarking and replying to it.

"I have heard your statement, sir," he said, as his fine form glowed with indignation. "and at other times should have answered it as it deserves. But I have other cares at present. I shall now, finding no hope here, ride in search of the General commanding. I shall find him I am told at the Fort. But I warn you—and I speak the words with the force of one who is as loyal as anyone here, and whose loyalty has been shown amid the thunders and smoke of the battlefield—that I shall have prompt and public enquiry made into this case. And if causeless and needless haste is shown in this matter, and an innocent life be lost, I shall see that ample reparation be had. The highest in the land shall hear of it."

With which haughty words the brave old gentleman strode angrily from among them.

Long impunity in deeds of violence had rendered these officers careless as to consequences, but his stern words and his well-known influence made them, when he had left, ponder with unusual seriousness over the position of affairs.

The girls were waiting for him outside on horseback.

"Well, father?"

"No use, Kate.'

"Father!"

"Not the slightest. What we have heard is only too true. They are determined to execute him."

"That is awful, father," said one of the girls, as a tremor of terror stole over her. "What do you intend doing? Something must be done. Merciful Heavens! this cannot be permitted."

"Not if it can be helped," said Colonel Victor, gloomily, as he mounted his horse.

"But what do you propose doing?"

"See the General. It is only a ride of eight miles. We may be able to do it within the time. There is no time for talking, girls. Come along!"

Over the rough, uneven roads that skirted the sea-road to Duncannon the three took their way, not daring to talk lest they might delay in their speed.

No time for looking at the exquisite scenery, at the glassy expanse of summer sea, with the sun of the May-day flooding it with golden light. No time for anything but thought of the young life about to be sacrificed, as they swept along, the hooves of their horses striking fire from the flinty rocks of the sea-washed roadway.

The fort of Duncannon was gained within the hour.

To their indescribable agony and disappointment, the General was not there. He had gone some miles further forward to look at other works and fortifications, where he might be found.

Whither, without delay or resting, they pursued their rapid way—a sense of despair and almost of suffocation possessing all three as they pressed forward.

Growing hopeless as was their mission with every half mile before them, with every speeding minute that passed over their heads, they yet thought it was the only course open.

Miserable as was the reflection that the more they turned their backs to the town, the faster the life-sands of their young friend ran out, still, almost in silence, they pursued their way, urging their horses to their highest speed.

CHAPTER XXV.

A STRANGE MEETING.

WHILST the high-spirited Colonel and his handsome daughters were pressing forward on their breathless mission of friendship and mercy, other scenes were being enacted at the barracks in Wexford.

The upturned cart, with dangling noose, was being put into a state of preparation. The soldiers were mustering in the barrack-yard. Somehow it began to be felt that the intended execution was one of more than usual importance.

The hour of twelve o'clock drew nigh, and Colonel Needham, who apprehended that Colonel Victor, with his well-known energy, might arrive in time with the General to thwart his projects, began to realise that no hindrance would likely come thereto.

Slowly the moments passed from a quarter to twelve to twelve, until the hands of the barrack clock pointed to the fatal hour.

Everything was getting into readiness. The officers on guard were mustering to the appointed place; the different patrols were appointed to their respective stations, for there was every precaution taken that this time at least there should be no excuse, and the law should take its course. The first tap of the drums echoed through the barrack-yard, when suddenly a messenger on horseback rode up to the gates. His horse was covered with dust and foam, and gave indications of a long and weary ride.

"Open!"

"From where?" asked the sentinel whom he addressed.

"From Dublin."

"From whom?"

"The Lord Lieutenant. Open in the King's name!"

The gates were thrown open, and the messenger rode in.

Inquiring for the officer in charge Colonel Needham came forward.

"This is for the General," said the messenger peremptorily, "but in his absence for you."

The officer opened it, read it; read it again, with a look of intense amazement on his face.

The other officers crowded around him. The news was soon communicated to them. It was a message commanding the liberation of Charles Churchington from prison.

It was signed by the Lord Lieutenant in person, and countersigned by the Commander of the Forces.

There was no ignoring this command. A few hours more sufficed to fill up the necessary forms, and to carry out the required preliminaries, and then Traveller No. 2 passed out through the barrack-gate a free man.

Declining the proffered hospitalities of the officers, who were profuse in their tenders of congratulation, now that it was shown that he possessed such high influence, he passed into the town.

His first intention was to hire a conveyance and proceed on his long-deferred visit to Colonel Victor, thinking to himself as he did so, what a singular tale of adventures he should be able to narrate to him and his family. His second intention, feeling weak and hungry after his long incarceration, was to get something to eat, for which purpose he turned into a hotel.

The dusk was settled on the town when he once more started to provide the conveyance to carry him to Colonel Victor's. The day had been so chock full of surprises that as he walked down the narrow streets towards the coaching offices he could scarcely realise them. His mind was wandering over a great many things foreign to the mission on which he was bent.

Suddenly his attention was attracted to the hurried entrance of a number of men into a house on his left. Whether it was that their entrance was made in such hurried and rough fashion, or to the men, some of whom, as they passed in, seemed not unfamiliar to him, he paused for a second as the door closed partially. He again moved on.

"I think I have seen some of these before. Scarcely though, for——"

His meditations were quickly interrupted, as the sound of a pistol shot, repeated once, or twice, came in quick succession, from the interior of the house, echoing dully on the unfrequented street.

"There appears to be some strange work going on here," said he, as with a quick turn he faced back towards the door.

Our friend was of that quick disposition that he was easily aroused to action. In a second he had pushed in the door, rushed into the hall, only to hear the sounds of strife proceeding from a room in the interior. He sought to push in the door, but found it firmly barred.

All at once his attention was attracted by the cries of a girl's voice in sore distress proceeding from upstairs. Believing that some one was being ill-treated, he rushed upwards, taking the steps two or three at a bound.

From within a doorway on the landing the cries proceeded with frightful frequency. With one tremendous leap at the door he made frame and door and hinges rattle and quiver. Another succeeding, to which he lent the whole force of his shoulder and whole weight and strength of his body, sent the door flying inward, and in the momentum with which he projected himself against it he fell headlong inward.

As he leaped to his feet, a man's form rushed past him. He caught him by the shoulder, for a moment but the other jerked himself from him and disappeared. Short as was the interval, however, he had time to partially recognize the features of the runaway.

He was about to spring after him when his progress was barred by a young girl who, throwing herself at his knees, begged his protection in piteous tones.

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked gently, as he found his knees clutched by the trembling hands of the supplicant.

"Oh for God's sake take me out of this! Take me out of this. Anywhere!"

"What has happened? What brings you here? What is the meaning of this?" he asked in a state of extremest surprise and wonderment.

But the form kneeling at his feet could find no other words but to repeat the same terrified form of entreaty—repeated them until all of a sudden they ceased, and she fell fainting against his knees.

"The poor girl has swooned," he thought. And with the thought he bent down, and taking her unconscious form in his arms, bore her swiftly down the stairs as if she were but

a feather, past the door within which the sounds of deadly strife still proceeded, and into the street.

His first intention was to bear her to the hotel he had just left for succour and for safety, but as he turned the angle of the street leading in that direction he found his progress barred by three horses coming down abreast. The street was so narrow that there was not room for him to pass.

Almost at the same moment two thoughts passed simultaneously through his brain, wholly divergent and unconnected. One was that the young girl, whose unconscious face rested on his shoulder, and whose long hair hung down his back, was a very handsome girl, and the other—

But the other found ready responses in his words, for as he glanced upwards at the parties barring, he involuntarily exclaimed—

"Colonel Victor!"

"Mr. Churchington!"

The tones of surprise noticeable in the astonished gentleman's words were strongly emphasized by the startled cry of his daughters as they suddenly reined up and backed their horses in affright. The awkwardness of the position struck the young gentleman at once. Without pausing a moment he therefore went on to say—

"I'm glad I have so unexpectedly met you. This poor girl, I am afraid, was about to receive some rough treatment at some scoundrel's hands. I shall need your help. Will you come with me as far as the hotel? I have a great deal to say to you."

This statement, made in hurried and excited language, disarmed whatever curious thoughts were arising in the Colonel's breast. Without waiting, therefore, for further questioning, he silently turned his horse's head, as did likewise the frightened young ladies, and they followed the young gentleman, with his burthen, to the hotel door. There they dismounted and followed him in.

The unconscious form of the young girl, placed on a sofa, did, indeed, when the light fell on her white face and dishevelled tresses, present to the Traveller No. 1, as he had somehow imagined, a face of wondrous beauty.

The long, silken eyelashes, drooping over the closed eyes,

the rounded contour of the white face, the marble fairness of the forehead, the long tresses of golden hair, and the neck fair as a lilly, disclosed to him a vision of beauty that startled and surprised him.

"This is most extraordinary," said Colonel Victor, as the bearer handed his fair charge over to the kind ministration of the hostess. "I know this young lady. She is the daughter of one of my tenants. Kate! Alice! is not this Miss Cottrell—our handsome Grace?"

The girls bent down over the unconscious form. They recognised her at once. Who that once saw her could fail to do so?

"Yes, father it is," said the girls together, in new astonishment.

"This is very strange."

"It is stranger how I came to bear a part in it," said Mr. Churchington, "I was proceeding to the booking office to get a conveyance to bear me on a visit too long delayed—to—in fact I was going to pay you a visit, Colonel Victor."

The Colonel bowed, whilst the young girls beside him listened with wrapt attention.

"I was passing by a house where there were sounds of strife going on—I entered, heard cries of distress from a girl's voice—rushed upstairs—found this young lady being assaulted by a ruffian who unfortunately escaped—and I carried her off, at her own piteous request before she swooned."

There was no mistaking the sincerity of his words—they carried their own conviction with them.

"It is very strange. I cannot understand it. To think that one of my tenants should be treated with incivility; a beautiful girl too—and as good as she is handsome. You did not—of course you could not?——know the ruffian?"

"I fear I did, Colonel Victor—fear, I say, because I should be sorry to see an officer disgrace his uniform by cowardly ruffianism of that kind. But we shall talk of that again. To what good luck am I indebted for the fortunate meeting?"

"That puts me in mind—Alice, Kate, let me introduce you to our old friend again. In the confusion I had quite forgotten to present them," said the Colonel.

"I am inclined to forgive all my maladventures," said the young gentleman with easy good breeding, as he greeted the young ladies warmly, "for the pleasure of this unexpected meeting. Early this morning I should not have expected it."

"Well, late this evening," said the Colonel, with a curious expression on his face, "we—that is, the girls and myself—certainly did not expect it."

"What good fortune brought you in my way?"

"Your own maladventures, as you call them. The fact is, we have been on your business all day. Your name has been seldom out of our thoughts since morning."

"You heard of my imprisonment, then?"

"Only this morning. And rather startling news it was."

"How did you hear of it?"

"Through some friends of yours. And that reminds me to ask you—how was your liberation effected? For though we sought to prevent the sentence from being carried out, it was far in the afternoon before we found the whereabouts of the General. And though we came back as quickly with him as fleet horses could bear us, of course it would have been too late."

"So your dress and those of the young ladies testify," said the young gentleman, glancing where the latter were kindly attending on the young girl; "but as to myself, when I found matters here—greatly to my surprise and consternation—getting too hot, I forwarded a note to my friends in Dublin."

"How did you effect that? It must have been a difficult matter from within the walls of a prison."

"And in sooth, so it would have been—they are not over courteous yonder"—nodding in the direction of the barracks, "with strangers; but I happened, by the merest chance, to become acquainted with a young naval officer on board the man-of-war in the harbour, who, when she was leaving for Dublin, undertook to bear my communication."

"A young naval officer," said Colonel Victor. "Do you happen to know his name?"

"Lieutenant Clarence."

"Lieutenant Clarence!"

"Yes; do you happen to know him?"

"If all I heard this morning be correct, I believe I do. But not by that name. And that only adds another to the many surprises and extraordinary coincidences of this day."

"How is that?"

"Why, if I am correct—and I believe I am; indeed, I am sure I am—that young officer who so providentially by his attention saved your life is brother to that young lady whom you have, so equally providentially, saved from outrage."

"Her brother!"

"Yes, that is so."

"Well, that is indeed a surprise. But it seems to me this County of Wexford of yours," said the young man with a smile, "is a land of surprises. At least it has been to me."

"They seem to be beginning with myself," said Colonel Victor, "Truth is, the times are growing so lawless, and the land, I grieve to say, so disturbed, that I am afraid further surprises are in store for us. But I see our young friend is recovering. Perhaps we had better go and engage a carriage whilst the ladies are attending to her. Of course you will travel with us now?"

"With the greatest possible pleasure, my dear Colonel. As I tell you, I was on that errand when this affair attracted my attention."

"Well, it is not everyone who would, after the narrow escape you have had, have freshly imperilled himself in a strange town to-day, and where he might fairly look on every man's hand as an enemy's."

"Independently of the satisfaction of having saved this dear young lady, I need not tell you how glad I am it happened, inasmuch as it gives me the ineffable pleasure of travelling with you. Indeed I should apologise for not having done so long ago, when all my maladventures would have been prevented."

"Never mind—we shall talk of these things afterwards. Better late than never, is truly applicable in this case, as it has enabled you to rescue this poor girl from the hands of her assailants."

"How," said the young gentleman as they left the apartment together, "shall we take means to provide for her future safety? She seems to be much too handsome to be left friendless and unprotected in a strange town."

"How?" said the Colonel. "Why, in the one way. I have settled it from the first in my own head. By carrying her with us in the carriage."

"To Kilbremmer."

"Why, yes, certainly. My daughters will be only too happy to attend to her. She is an old friend of mine and of the girls', too."

"I am delighted to hear that," said the youth, warmly. "I could not rest easy knowing that she was left behind in a town like this, under martial law and the unbounded rule of a licentious soldiery."

"She will come to no harm, poor girl, henceforward."

In a short time the carriage was ready. In a very short time also, Grace Cottrell recovered sufficiently to be carried thereto, and before the stars were much higher in the sky four swift horses were whirling the carriage, with Colonel Victor, his daughters, Charles Churchington, and Grace Corttrell, through the night and along the road to the mansion and sheltering avenues of Kilbremmer.

If there were sorrow and affliction gathering over the fair land of Wexford, over her quiet farm-houses, and sleeping orchards, there was but little of it in the carriage as it whirled along. And with the exception of Grace, whose head was giddy with, and suffering from, the terrors of the past two nights, no merrier party ever gathered together within the mansion-house walls, than the Colonel and his party, when they reached Kilbremmer.

For many reasons it was thought better that, until she quite recovered, the whereabouts of Grace should remain concealed. A few lines, conveyed by a sure hand, to her mother, to intimate that she was safe and securely placed, was the only intimation given of her position.

The Colonel rightly considered that the safer she was kept for the present until the disturbances passed over, the better, and that the less was known by anyone of her whereabouts the better also.

In this, however, he miscalculated with direful inaccuracy.

It never occurred to him the hearts—with love stronger than that of a mother, brother, or sister—that were torn with unappeasable agony in ignorance of her fate. It never occurred to him that there might be those to whom her fate

was dearer and more precious than even life itself, and who would unceasingly search for her.

And so, whilst Grace, in the careful nursing and tending and unquestioned safety of Kilbremmer, was rapidly recovering health and strength—regaining to her eyes the old smile of brightness, and to her cheek the rich trace of its late loveliness—events, because of them, were hastening with swiftness to their completion.

From the quiet old mansion embowered in the woods, with its face to the southern sea and its many-windowed front aglow with the golden rays of the summer sun, shadows of gloom and misery, and sorrow, and suffering were being flung far and wide over peaceful Wexford—ominous presages of that which was to come.

But no one was there to interpret them—no Daniel was there to read the handwriting on the wall—and so the shadows lengthened and grew—spreading heavily over thatched farmhouse and peaceful orchard.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE BURNING OF BOOLAVOGUE.

SOME three weeks subsequent to the events narrated in our last chapter, two of the actors therein were passing across the fields that led from Knock-na-Raheen to the chapel of Boolavogue on their way stealthily to early Mass. They had been talking of their unsuccessful and rather quixotic adventure into Wexford, from which they had escaped with difficulty and by many stratagems, and wondering what fate had befallen Watt o' the Crosses.

Suddenly one of them exclaimed :

" Murrough ! "

" Yes, Mehaul."

" I say, look—look ! "

" Where ? " asked Murrough, who was engaged in deep thought over the events they had been talking of, and who at first thought it was to a hare his attention had been directed.

"Yonder! The chapel."

"What!" said Murrough, stepping back a pace or two, as his eyes fell in the direction.

"It's nothing else," said Mehaul in answer to his astonished look, "but on fire it is."

"It couldn't be. They wouldn't do that surely."

"They'd do anything. Where else would the smoke be comin' from?"

"Nowhere else," assented Murrough in amazed surprise.

"That's what I say. The villains have set it on fire. Let us run forward."

"Stay, Mehaul," said Murrough, placing his hand on his companion's shoulder just as he was about to be off, "if the sojers are there, or the yeos, they won't think much ov turning their muskets on us, if they see us. Is there any use in that?"

"In what?" asked Mehaul, not quite catching up his meaning.

"In lettin' 'em kill us; in walking over to 'em wid bare breasts and bare hands?"

"No; certainly not."

"That's what you're goin' to do, Mehaul."

"I believe you're right," said Mehaul. "What shall we do?"

"Creep down to the hedges quietly athout bein' seen, an' see what's goin' on."

Mehaul saw that the suggestion was a good one, and, following his companion, he stooped down, and in single file, under the shelter of the high hedges, advanced in the direction of the chapel.

One last look thitherwards was sufficient to convince them that Mehaul's sudden conclusion was perfectly correct.

Below them, at the base of the hill, and behind an intervening clump of trees, a thick smoke arose. By degrees, and with remarkable swiftness, this cloud lifted itself until the fresh air of the morning was scented with the foul smell of burning thatch, and the bright glory of the sun was dimmed and darkened by a yellow wreath of smoke.

The smoke, now arising in dense clouds, ascended from the place wherein the chapel would be situate, judging its position from where they were.

"It is the chapel, Murrough," said Mehaul, as a burst of flame ascended through the smoke-cloud.

"It *is*," said Murrough, staying himself in his progress and gazing at the spectacle, his face pale with surprise and emotion. "God bless us, I never thought it would kum to this. I thought they'd spare the house of God, anyhow."

"Ay, they've robbed the people, an' flogged an' murdered them, an' now they've put the cap on id all by firin' the chapel."

"There'll be no Mass in Boolavogue this Sunday anyhow," said Murrough, with a singular touch of sorrow in his voice.

"No, nor for many another Sunday," said Mehaul. "There won't be soon, av' things go on as they are, a congregation no more nor a chapel."

"Let us push on at any rate," said Murrough; "may be we can be of some use."

"What's that?" burst in Mehaul suddenly, pointing southwards, where the Slaney glimmered through the fringe of smoke like a silver ribbon, and where, also, shone through the darkness the glint of steel.

"It's the shine of bayonets through the smoke. That's what it is," said Murrough, "they're ridin' off to Wexford. They've done their dirty work an' are makin' off. The curse of Crommill be around 'em."

"It's the yeos," said Mehaul, trying to peer through his fingers at the retreating riders.

"Aye, an' the North Cork, too. D'ye hear that? They're shooting some poor crathur, as sure as you're livin'."

"An' there's another shot—an' another—an' another, said Mehaul excitedly. "Come along Murrough; come, along."

Their excitement by this time had gotten the better of their sense of prudence, and, abandoning their hiding position, they ran swiftly along in the direction of the burning building. In a few minutes they had cleared the last field that intervened, and leaping the last hedge, had found themselves on the high road in front of the chapel.

The building was, indeed, in flames. From its low roof of thatch the blaze shot up with great fury. The straw was dry as tinder, and as it was unusual ever to remove the old

covering, but to add a fresh layer thereto, it was very thick, and afforded abundant food for fire.

A heavy pall of smoke lay covering the fields around, through which the flames burst with intense fury. The interior was lit up with a glare of light. They could see when the blaze leaped from the gallery to the altar, the woodwork of both being almost at the same moment in flame.

The vestments—there being no vestry attached to the humble chapel—were laid ready for the priest to assume them when the time appointed for the sacred office had arrived. In a twinkling the fire had seized upon them, and they went off in its powerful breath like a puff of powder.

"Oh, Mehaul, isn't that awful?" said Murrough, as his terrified eyes saw the flame laying hold of the tabernacle, wherein the chalice and other sacred vessels were kept.

"Awful! God preserve us," said Mehaul, equally terrified at the act of sacrilege and profanation they were witnessing.

"What will Father John say? I wonder God allows it"

"How dare you use the name of God impiously?" said a voice behind them, sternly. Startled by the unexpected words, they turned round.

Father John was standing behind them—mutely looking on at his burning chapel.

"Oh, Father John, I beg your pardon," said Murrough, timidly.

"Don't beg my pardon," said the priest; "but beg God's pardon for calling His will in question. The ways of God are inscrutable and must not be judged by us, weak creatures."

He spoke quietly; but his face, usually flushed and well-coloured with the active, temperate life he led, was deadly pale.

"The villains have burned the chapel, Father John," said Mehaul, dropping a step back and placing himself beside him.

"They have," said Father John, in a quiet whisper, not taking his eyes off the burning altar; "but they have done worse than that."

"Worse than that?" said Mehaul, to whom nothing than that act of sacrilege could appear more hideous.

"Yes, worse than that, Mehaul-na-Corriga. They have committed murder—many murders last night and this morning. And worse again, they have outraged innocent virtue!"

"What's to be done, Father John?" asked Mehaul, anxiously turning to the priest and looking into his face. "There'll be no Mass said here this morning."

"No, indeed, Mehaul," assented the priest, his eyes still fixed on his burning chapel.

"What will the people do? They'll be all slaughtered like sheep, athout raisin' a hand to help themselves."

"They will not; they must not," said the priest earnestly. "I have done all I could to keep order and preserve peace, but it has been useless, worse than useless. To do so any longer would be criminal. It would be conniving at their murder. The people must now defend themselves. The light of their burning chapel must teach them how."

"But their arms, Father John?"

"That is what rends my heart," said the priest; and his voice for the first time trembled with agony. "I have induced them to give them up, and to leave themselves defenceless before the villains that are thirsting for their lives. I feel more regret for that than for this profaned altar."

"They have not given them all up, Father John," said Mehaul significantly.

"Do you think so?"

"I do. I am sure of it."

"Sure of it?" asked the priest with a new expression of interest.

"Ay am I, your reverence; not one for every two they kept."

"Then I thank Thee, oh, my God!" said Father John, reverently lifting his hat, "that Thou hast kept my foolish counsels from prevailing with my afflicted people. Oh, Thou Who hast kept the sun standing in the valley of Ajalon in aid of Thy faithful servant, stretch out Thy hands this day from Heaven to help and save Thy afflicted and faithful people here. Guide them, strengthen them, to do right."

By this time the people were gathering rapidly. From every dwelling for miles around whence the burning temple was visible, crowds came running. Over the fields by short

cuts, and, where no short cuts existed, across fields and ditches and hedges, men, women, and children came, heedless of the difficulties in their way.

Dressed, or partially dressed, they left their homes as the news swept with lightning rapidity from one household to the other—from those on the hills who were in view of it to those in the valley who were not—and hurried forth. Some in the haste of the moment, not able to realise what was occurring, but impressed with a fearful sense that something dreadful was happening, seized whatever weapon (hatchet, or pike, or hay-fork) that came first to their hands.

Others, more coolly, seized their guns, looked to the priming, buckled round them the belt containing their powder-horns and bullet-pouches, and having done so, left their houses and joined in with the others.

Every field had its two or three rushing forms crossing it; across every hedge half a dozen excited men were leaping with throbbing hearts.

The cries of women and girls arose on the morning air as they came in sight of the burning chapel. To their simple Catholic hearts no deed of murder or burning could bring such sense of terror and awe as this act of sacrilege. That the altar whereon every Sunday the holy sacrifice of the Mass was offered, repeating again the sacrifice of Calvary, should be thus wantonly destroyed, seemed enough to call down the vengeance of an angry God not only on the perpetrators but on the whole country.

But, independently of this awful act of desecration, loving and tender memories were woven into their hearts in connection with this humble temple of religion.

At the little wooden font beside the altar the saving waters of baptism had been poured on their own heads. There the young mother's first-born had been carried, and had thence been borne back to her delighted eyes a regenerated Christian. At that altar, whence the cloud of smoke and fiery blaze arose, the young girl had pledged her innocent faith to her husband. Ah! therefrom she had risen up, her troth plighted, and the delighted anticipations of her heart realised. There she had gone, a little girl by her mother's side, and learned to kneel with becoming attention at the great sacrifice of the Mass—as great and as wonderful offered

up on that humble altar as amid the pomp and incense of the high altar of St. Peter's at Rome.

What wonder that cries of awe and terror arose wherever the affrighted eyes of women rested on the burning chapel!

As the men gathered in front (and at a respectful distance, from the priest) they remained silently watching the burning, resting on the scythe, on the pike, or the long-barrelled musket as the case might be. In the gathering crowd a pin might be heard to fall; save the beating of their hearts or the hissing of their breaths, not a sound was heard. A feeling of stupefaction, of terror, rage, despair, revenge, seemed to keep them silent!

Everyone seemed to feel that a crisis was at hand, and all waited in breathless expectancy to see what Father John would do—what action he would take.

This was soon determined.

A hoarse cry of suppressed emotion burst from the women kneeling around, and a burst of wrath from the men, as the thatched roof fell in, sending up a shower of sparks. This only added fresh fuel to the furnace raging below, and the as-yet untouched particles of thatch, now heated to the utmost degree, flew up in fresh flames. The interior of the chapel was a mass of glowing fire, so intense that the mud-built walls cracked under its influence, and gaping clefts appeared in them in several places.

"Murrough!"

Murrough, who had been looking on in a state of gloomy reverie, started as the words fell on his ear. It was the priest that spoke.

"Murrough! and you, Mehaul! and all you men who hear me, follow me!"

The priest moved slowly away from the burning ruins of his little temple, and as he did so, those whom he addressed mechanically followed him.

"Men of the Parish of Boolavogue!" said he, mounting the steps of a little wayside stile that led from the road into a neighbouring field. "Can you hear me from where I speak?"

A murmur of assent rose from the crowding ranks. In their excited state and in their strained attention to hear what he had to say, they would have heard even a whisper from him.

"God bless your reverence, an' look down on you! to be sure we can!"

"Now, listen to me, my good friends, and hearken to what I say."

His face, even through the cloud of smoke which surrounded him, looked wan and pale. But in his set lips and flashing eye there was evidence of the struggle that was going on within him.

"I have always, since first I came to be your parish priest, been your friend—have I not?"

"You have, the good God love you for id!" burst forth in overwhelming emotion, in answer to his question.

"As I ought. I always found you obedient, docile children—honest, sober, and peaceable. Many of the young men that stand around me I have baptized, and I have known their conduct from that day to this."

"You have, Soggarth aroon—'tis yourself had the love for us!" came from the lips of some of the crying women around; but the men, leaning on their long-barrelled muskets, or with their scythes and pikes negligently thrown across the shoulder, stood silently waiting to hear further.

"I have been at your weddings and your christenings; I have said the Mass over your deceased friends; and, as far as I could, during many years I have done the best I could for every man, woman, and child, from the lowest to the highest, both spiritually and temporally."

"Oh, musha, God knows you did," was the pathetic response of the women. "It's yourself that has the sore heart this mornin'."

"Among other things, I have endeavoured to preserve peace and order among you. I have kept you quiet under circumstances and outrages that pressed dreadfully on you—amid burnings and woundings and floggings and murders. In this I deeply regret I have done wrong. I miscalculated the condition of the country, and I had hoped that this state of things would soon cease. But I have been disappointed—cruelly disappointed!"

A movement among the crowd of men, which was not of assent or dissent, but which seemed to be on the part of all an effort to breathe more freely, alone made response to this statement.

The priest paused for a moment, whilst his eye turned to the burning chapel.

"In this I have been disappointed, cruelly disappointed. Matters are growing worse. The country is black with burned houses. The boreens are dotted with slaughtered people, young and old. The cries of injured girlhood almost make the face of the sun darken in the noonday!"

A cry for the first time burst from the throbbing hearts around him—partly in sorrowful assent to what he said, partly in fierce cry for revenge, but swelling into one hoarse, quick volume of voice, that fell almost as sharply as it rose—a momentary burst that immediately settled into dead silence!

"Even these uniformed murderers have not spared the house of God Himself. Can we stand this any longer? Are we bound in the sight of God to stand any longer quietly by to see our brothers murdered, our sisters ruined? Has the Great Being, who gave us the hearts and strength of men, ordained us to stand quietly still, and suffer these cruel outrages to continue? I say, my friends, I believe not. There has never been yet in the history of the world any nation so cruelly trampled that has not risen up to avenge their outraged manhood. And I now proclaim in the face of high heaven that our time has come! We shall stand it no longer. To do so would be abasing ourselves below the humblest living things that creep the earth. All those that agree with me lift up their hands—their right hands!"

A cheer, a cry, trembling with passionate hate and revenge, burst from the assembled crowd, blent with a cacoein of anguish from the women and girls. The right hands of the men were uplifted, and with them the arms they bore. Through the cloud of smoke that still veiled them like a black mist, the polished barrel of musket, the bright steel blade of scythe, the iron point of pikehead glistened redly as the blaze of the still burning chapel reflected on them. It was a very weird sight, and many of the girls near the chapel, as the sudden reflection smote their eyes, fell in a swoon!

"I am glad to see, though it is not to-day or yesterday I had the proof of your courage, that you are of my mind.

There is no time to be lost! All those that have arms follow me to the Hill of Oulart. All that have not, return for them and follow us. All the women-kind return to their homes. There will be no Mass said this morning in Boolavogue. Together we shall fight for liberty and peace in Ireland, and against ruin and murder, together, if it be God's blessed will, we shall die!"

Father John descended from his little elevation amid the huzzahs of five hundred burning hearts and the wildest demonstrations of joy. Strong men threw themselves upon one another, and embraced. Tears of triumphant rejoicing stood in many eyes. Men shook hands rapturously with those they had not seen for months, and others hugged their long muskets as if they were their children.

At last the hour had come. At last that long stupor of sorrow and ruin was over, their enforced state of submission was at an end, the chance of returning blow for blow was open to them. Their sense of outraged manhood was at last to be appeased.

"God bless you, Father John!" said Mehaul as he clasped the priest's hands on his descent. "May I never sin! but I'm prouder this moment nor if I was made king of the Indies."

What particular honour attached to this elevated position in the blacksmith's mind is not known; but judging by the light that shone in his eyes, the bright gleam of satisfaction that lit up his features, and the throbbing of his heart, easily visible in the rise and fall of his broad breast, it was clear it was of a very high order.

"You're coming with us, Mehaul?" asked the priest.

"No, I'm not, Father John," said Mehaul, cheerfully.

"No!" The priest stood for a second with a look of surprise on his face.

"No, I'm not," responded Mehaul; "not at wanst, at laist. But, plaze God, I won't be long behind you."

"I thought——"

"You thought right, your reverence," said Mehaul, interrupting. "But, don't you see, Father John, there's some friends of mine at home I can't lave athout——"

"Some friends," said Father John sternly. "Mehaul this is no time for——"

"Arrah, God bless your reverence's sowl, shure they're friends that's lying hid undher the floore ov the forge—right undher the bellows—where you stand to blow id. Right well your reverence knows the place; and be the light that shines! I wouldn't lave 'em ahind me this mornin' to save the right hand on my body."

The sternness of the priest's face relaxed into a bright smile, which was his wont when anything pleased him. "God bless you, Mehaul," he said, clasping him warmly by the hand. "You always had a stout heart; and if I had not curbed you so much things would not be as they are now."

"Arrah, maybe it's all for the best, your reverence," said Mehaul. "Who knows?"

"Ah, who knows? The ways of God are inscrutable," said Father John. "He chastens those He loves, but He never suffers them to be tried beyond their strength. And you, Murrough—"

"I am goin' with your reverence," said Murrough.

"But you have no arms."

"No; I haven't, your reverence."

"Why? Can you not go back for them? You can readily overtake us."'

"Doesn't your reverence remimber? We gev' 'em up when you told us. An' be the same token, more's the pity."

"Oh miserable me!" said Father John in a burst of sorrow. "I have destroyed my people."

"Don't mind what I said, Father John," said Murrough, who instantaneously regretted his words when he saw the anguish of his priest. "Depend upon it, Mehaul won't come after us empty-handed."

"You may sware that," affirmed Mehaul, confidently.

"Then there is no time to be lost. Our brothers are up throughout the land, and mayhap God has seen fit to force us into their ranks. Even as Gideon smote the tyrant and the destroyer of his people, long ago, so may we be able to save our oppressed. Forward, my men, forward. To Oulart Hill!"

"To Oulart Hill!" rose with hoarse acclaim from the crowd, and, settling themselves into rough form of military array, they proceeded onward.

The military character of the Irish race speedily developed itself in this instance. Almost at once the swaying multitude, as they advanced, formed themselves into ranks of four deep, the greatest number abreast that the width of the public road would admit of, and moved in good order forward.

In a short time they had passed from the region of smoke into that of fresh morning light; and as the bright sun flashed upon the gleaming steel, and the long array of marshalled men wound in fair military order along the road, a feeling of pride and hope diffused itself in all hearts. The crouching step of those who previously lived in dread of their lives gave way to the bounding sense of freedom and manhood!

Behind the column of marching men a crowd of women and girls followed—the wives and sisters of those in front. Others of the females hurried home to look after their household affairs or their children, or get ready food and clothing for those assembling at Oulart Hill, most of them with a mingled feeling of rejoicing and of awe of something dreadful about to happen causing the tears to flow from their eyes.

Mehaul, standing on the stile whereon the priest had stood addressing the people, watched the column of rude warriors as they disappeared around a winding of the road.

Then he descended and bent his steps hurriedly homeward.

"I'm afraid it's too late, Father John," he soliloquized aloud, as he hastened his steps. "Anyhow, God bless you. There's not much of the coward about you."

Arrived at the forge, he bade the little boy who attended him prepare the pony and car, and having provided himself with a spade, proceeded to uncover the earth from the place underneath the bellows. He was not long disclosing his hidden treaasures.

Safely tied up in *suggawns* of hay, he lifted up bundle after bundle of long larchen handles, beautifully planed and rounded. On the top there was firmly screwed the steel head diminishing to a sharp point and with a sharp hook some six inches from the latter. This was intended for cutting, when at close quarters, the reins of the horses, and so rendering the steeds unmanageable.

With a tenderness as if it were a sick child in his arms, Mehaul lifted up bundle after bundle of his cherished weapons, and laid them standing slantingly against the wall.

Treasure seeker raising the products of the golden mine from the recesses of the earth never viewed his ingots with greater pleasure than did the smith these formidable fruits of his handiwork.

"There you are Scollogh, straight as an arrow! An' you Mullawn, sorra a twist or a knot in you from top to bottom! Ah, my brave Dunbeg, good you wor always for rearin' the sthraight ash plant. I don't think a crooked wan wud grow in you! Me bould Donclood, a man could twist you round his knee an' you wouldn't break. More power to you Bahana."

This rhapsodical address originated in different bundles being named by him after the different woods in which the handles had been cut.

"Eight bundles—ten in each—Well if—What!

"It's I, Mehaul; don't be alarmed," said a voice behind.

"You, Watt?"

"The same, Mehaul."

"Oh, the blessin' o' God be about us, bud its glad I'm to see your four bones. Where in the world did you come from?"

"I came on a sorrowful errand, Mehaul."

"Be the powers o' Molly Davy," said Mehaul, stretching forth his hand to shake that of the other, "if an angel kum from heaven I wouldn't be half as glad to see him. I thought I never would lay me two good lookin' eyes on you agin."

"I'm not surprised at it," said Watt, sorrowfully.

"No faix, why should you? What on earth happened you that night?"

"It's too long a story to tell now, Mehaul; and moreover, it is not of myself I'm thinking at present. You can hear that story another time."

"You're right there," said Mehaul emphatically. "It's ov other things we must be thinkin' now."

"Quite so," said Watt, who believed the smith's mind to be running in the same vein as his own," "Where is Grace?"

"Grace!" echoed Mehaul, whose mind was so occupied by widely divergent things that he could not for some time comprehend the nature of the question.

"Yes, Grace," said Watt, whilst his brow flushed in anger over the careless nature of the answer. "I hope the poor girl has not been forgotten and abandoned during my illness. Because if——"

"Why no, Watt, surely not. Grace is quite well."

"She is—is she?" cried Watt in ecstacy, clutching with hearty warmth the blacksmith's hand again. "Where is she? I am under a thousand obligations to you, Mehaul, my old friend. But where is she?"

"I—I don't know," said Mehaul, scarcely knowing what answer to make.

"You don't know," said Watt in sudden surprise, "Why don't you know? Who knows?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know. What do you mean by saying she is well? Where is she? Answer me, for I am not in a humour to be brooked this moment."

"You are not well, Watt," said the smith as he noticed the thick drops of blood ooze from his forehead underneath his hat.

"Don't mind me. Answer my question if you do not wish to set me mad. Where is she?"

"Sorra—faix, Watt! but if you ax me that way I can't tell you no more nor the dead that's in their clay. But I'll tell you what I do know."

"Do at once, if you would have pity on me and prevent my doing harm to myself or others. Where is she, and how do you know she is well?"

"Listen to me now, Watt, an' in a few words spakin' I'll tell you all I know. That evening in Wexford, when you got that ugly cut on your head—that's not well yet, as I can see—we saw you going into the house after Gordon; shortly after we saw some soldiers go in, we heard a shot, and thinkin' you wor in danger we rushed in to help you. I got a baynot run through my arm," here the smith turned up the sleeve on his huge arm, and displayed a bayonet wound through the muscles of his forearm, newly cicatrised, "and when you disappeared so that high or low we couldn't find you afterwards——"

"Yes, I remember. Don't mind that. Come to the point that I want. Where is she?"

"I'm coming to it as fast as I can. The next day a letter arrived to say she was quite well, an' not to be frettin' about her."

"That she was quite well," said Watt, pausing in a state of doubt, wherein a thousand terrifying ideas rushed into his mind. "Who brought the message?"

"That's what no one knows."

"Surely some one must have seen him?"

"So there did. But 'twas only when the letter was opened and read that people began axin' about him. An' thin 'twas found that nobody could tell where he went or what had become of him."

"Merciful God!" said Watt, in whose excitement the strangest thoughts occurred; "and is that all that is known of the poor girl? Some deceitful, misleading letter, I have no doubt, written in her name."

"Sorra wan ov id was, Watt. It was in her own handwriting. Every one allows that."

"And did you make no other search for her?" said Watt, in frightful bitterness.

"Sarch, is it? You know little about us when you ax that. Arrah to be sure we did. Night an' day sinse, we sarched for her; but that's all we could get ov id."

"Oh, my God!" said the youth, as he leaned his arm against the post of the door, and rested his forehead against it, whilst his frame shivered with the agony that possessed him, "she is lost, and I am lost with her!"

"No; she's not lost, Watt. Grace Cottrell is right enough, you may depend on it. She's not the girl to write that letter if she wasn't. Sorra hand that ever lifted itself in the light of day could make her write it. She's safe enough. But *where* she is is quite another thing. I'm tould——"

"Yes, you're told——" urged Watt, seeing the other pause, and partly reassured by his words, and stirred by the hope the incomplete statement had given him. "You're told—What were you told?"

"That she was seen in Ross not two days ago with a gintleman and two young ladies."

"Ross?"

"Sorra more or less—in Ross. More betoken in a covered carriage. That shows she was in good keepin'."

"I'll go there at once," said Watt, whose continental experiences of the practices of high-going folk did not at all accord with those of Mehaul—"I'll go there at once."

"Sorra a go. You mustn't even if you could, and you could'nt even if you would. It's an althered time in Wexford even since sunrise this mornin'."

"What do you mean?"

He paused.

Watt stood back awhile in stupefaction.

"Mane! What do I mane? What do these heaps of pikes mean? What do these bundles of muskets mean?"

"Mean!" he said incomprehendingly.

"Yes, mane. That's just id. I'll tell you what they mane, if you can't guess. They mane the rebellion's bruk out! They mane that the hills ov Wexford an' the plains ov Wexford, an' the glens an' valleys of Wexford, are fillin' to-day as fast as they can with Wexford men with pike and musket, an that they're detarmined wance for all to see if they can't make their own hills an' country their own once more."

Watt glanced at him—glanced from him to the unearthed bundles of pikes and heaps of muskets—then to the steaming and swarthy face of his interlocutor.

"I see you don't half believe me. But I tell you it's true—true as this blessed day is Sunday. The chapel of Boolavogue was burned to ashes this morning! There now! What more mischief was done we can't say, but this I say, that no man wid the heart of a true Waxford man in him to-day is but out for Ireland's freedom. Come what may, it will be tried now!"

"That is strange news to me," said Watt, deeply moved by what he heard and by the vehemence of the speaker. For the moment his thoughts were turned away from the speaker to what was nearest his heart. "I heard nothing of this before."

"Well you hear it now. And I tell you more—that if you want to see Grace Cottrell, an' if you want to show yourself worthy of her, you'll join your ould neighbours and friends—an' try your chance side by side wid 'em. You have no more raison to love or like the Sassenach, nor his murdherin' sojers, no more nor we have!"

"Certainly not."

"Then join us."

"Most assuredly, I will."

"More power to you, Watt. I always knew the good dhrop was in you!"

Mehaul shook him warmly by the hand again in token of his appreciation of his patriotism.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ON OULART HILL.

THE sun streams down on Oulart Hill; it decks with a glow of light and beauty the far-extending reach of country; of hill and valley, of glistening stream and wood, that lay between it and Wexford on one side and the mountains on the other. Far away the road to the former lay gleaming white and winding in the distance; hidden here and there, when it ran parallel to their position, by whin bushes glistening with yellow flowers, or by the prickly hawthorn, white with blossoms; but where it ran straight, and the eye took up its direction, its white, dusty appearance, like a line of scattered flour, contrasted pleasantly with the exceeding greenness of the bordering meadows.

On the hill itself, when Watt and his friends reached there, the manhood of the neighbouring districts had gathered.

Tall, stalwart young men, lithe of limb and supple as greyhounds, who were now for the first time to see blood shed in warfare; old men bent with age, in whom old memories survived and who were perhaps, glad that the day had dawned when a blow might be struck for Irish freedom. Similarly, little boys gambolling on the green turf that covered the oval-backed hill, wholly unknowing and uncaring what had brought the gathering hither, and merely looking on it as they would on a neighbouring fair or pattern.

Not similarly, however, the wives and daughters of the insurgents. To them the rising of the people brought the realisation of the dark shadows that for months had been gathering around their quiet households and weighing heavily on their hearts. To them it meant ruin, and separation,

and loneliness—weeping widows, orphaned children, ruined homes.

The stern determination of the men, as also the airy humour with which for some mystic reason Irishmen always meet danger, banished these brooding fears from even the women; and as the necessity for some sort of organisation arose, and some preparation for defence, other feelings subsided into this.

"You here, Watt," said Father John, as, in the midst of the confusion, Mehaul and his companions approached the clerical leader.

"Yes, sir," said Watt, who was surprised at the ready recognition.

"I expected as much. Indeed, I thought so, when I saw you on the mail-coach on Christmas Eve."

"I did not know," said Watt, "that you recognised me then."

"Pooh! boy, I never laid eyes on a parishioner whom I would not know again. But I am glad to see you here."

"That is not in accord with your address, Father John, on Christmas Day."

"No," said the priest with an air of melancholy pervading the firmness of his appearance; "but times have altered since. I fear, I greatly fear, I did you wrong, then. It must have appeared strange to you, who came over with other notions."

"Strange to say, I did not."

"What! not come over with revolutionary notions?"

"No indeed, Father John. I had not even heard of it at that time; nor did I intend to join it until an hour ago."

"Well, indeed, in this, as with other matters, better late than never."

"I trust so."

"It is so. But tell me! You have a pratical eye in these matters. What is that cloud of dust rolling along the road in the distance yonder?"

All eyes were attracted in the direction indicated by the priest. Far away in the distance, and on the road leading to Wexford, a heavy cloud of dust arose in the summer noon.

"That," said Watt, as he glanced at it for a short time intently, "is a column of troops moving hitherwards."

"So it is," assented the priest. "I can see even at this distance the gleam of their bayonets occasionally, as they emerge from the cloud of dust."

"Yes; and they are moving to attack us," said Watt. "Nothing else would bring them to this place to-day."

"Nothing else," assented the priest. "We had better prepare for them."

"Time enough," said Watt, who by a singular concensus of opinion already took the leadership. "The occasion will develop the necessary defence. Nothing tires and disheartens irregular troops like waiting for an attack. Let the nature of the attack suggest the defence. What arms have we?"

A hasty review of the forces assembled showed them quickly. Not at all a satisfactory review, to Watt's way of thinking. Some hundreds of pikes—including those Mehaul had brought—held by strong arms, no doubt, and good in close fighting, but valueless, or nearly so, against muskets, which could mow down their holders long before they could bring their pikes within effective service. Add to this some forty or fifty fowling-pieces, and the whole arsenal of the insurgent force was counted.

"Would to God!" thought Watt to himself, "such men as these held in their hands a few thousand of our French arms. What a magnificent force they would constitute."

Bethinking, however, that vain regrets at this moment were something worse than useless, and remembering what enthusiasm had done often and often for the rude armies of the French revolutionary days, he kept his thoughts to himself.

"Well," said Father John anxiously, "what do you think of them?"

"I think," said Watt decisively, "that, with a fair chance, no military can stand before them, but they must be led with discretion, and not left to their own headlong impetuosity."

"Precisely what I was thinking myself," said the priest. "However we shall act under your instructions. You will obey Watt of the Crosses, boys—will you not? He is a Colonel in the French service, and understands warfare."

An enthusiastic shout of affirmation answered his question. A salvo of ringing cheers made him welcome among them. It was only then that Watt knew how widely his return and his foreign military achievements had become known during his confinement.

He acknowledged the enthusiasm of the people by lifting his cap in military fashion, which again produced a hoarse roar of cheering. Women and girls, through the circling ranks of uplifted pikes, crept forward to see their old acquaintance of other days, in his new character of revolutionary leader.

"Musha the blessing ov God be over him! Isn't it himself has grown a fine man?"

"Sorra bit but 'twas God sent him to us back again. Arrah what would our poor boys know about fightin' sogers, only for him?"

"Faix, it's his own mother ought to be proud ov him—the fine young fellow that he is!"

These and such exclamations as these resounded on all sides. Watt, however, was too intent on other matters to listen to them or even to hear them.

In the distance, but amid the cloud of dust thrown up on the white roads by their approach, gleamed the bayonets of the advancing soldiers, as they came nearer and more distinctly into view. The long lines extended for a considerable distance behind; and as at every turn of the road flashed out the sheen of the summer sun on their gleaming steel, the effect was fine, striking, and warlike.

Watt watched them with silent intentness for some time as he critically compared their method of marching with that of Continental armies. Meantime those nearest to him shifted their eyes, from the threatening lines of steel advancing, to his face; and as they saw there not the faintest shadow of fear, but rather a bright look of admiration as he saw the regular disciplined movements in advance, their spirits rose considerably, and they even began to jest at their approaching enemies.

"Begorra, I wonder if they'll go back so fine an' regular," said one young fellow, leaning on his pike, as he, too, looked towards the advancing troops.

"Sorra bit; but I don't think they'll leave a morsel ov

dust on the road to hide 'em when they're marchin' back," said another in response.

Watt thought he knew the voice, and, glancing in the direction, saw Murrough. A smile lit up his face as he did so, and an answering smile wreathed itself on the face of the other.

"You here, Murrough?"

"Ay faix, Watt, honey. I owe 'em an ould debt," pointing to the wound on his forehead, "an' faix, as I haven't been at Mass to-day, I mane to do some other good turn: I'll pay me debts. I'll give 'em back this," pointing to his pike.

"You were always an honest fellow, Murrough," said Watt, who could not even then refrain from entering into the humour of his friend.

"Thrue for you, Watt. Faix I was always like yourself in that way. I never took a salmon out ov the Slaney yet that I didn't give a batin' to the procthor just to pay for it."

"Keep to that Murrough."

"Ay, be me sowl!" said Murrough vehemently, "'twas a lesson I larnt from yerself."

"Just so; but——Hallo!"

Whilst they were speaking, Watt's eyes had been diverted from the approaching column of bayonets. Looking again, he was surprised to see that the foremost files had disappeared under the brow of the hill, of whose presence he was not until then aware.

"You are not acquainted with the inequalities of our country, I see," said Father John, noticing his glance. "There is another brow of the same kind, and yet another, before they commence the ascent of Oulart Hill."

"That is fortunate," said Watt, as his mind instantaneously formed the plan of action. "See, Murrough, take all the women and unarmed men across the brow of this hill, straight in their view when they turn the ascent they are now climbing and come within view. Let the armed men remain with me."

In accordance with his directions, Murrough and some others at once directed themselves to guiding the greater portion of the crowd up the brow of the hill, and towards the side looking towards the Blackstairs mountain.

At the moment the foremost bayonets of the approaching force glinted above the hill behind which they were hidden previously in their ascent, and a distant cheer announced to Watt and his surrounders that the movement had been seen, and was at once taken by the approaching soldiers for defeat or retreat.

As might, indeed, be at once perceived by the impetus given to their forward movement, the foremost ranks of the advancing army crossed the brow of the hill and descended into the next valley at a run.

Standing silently, as did the close body around him, until the last bayonet had been hidden by the next brow, Watt quietly said:

"Mehaul, take the pikemen at once; let them run and hide themselves at either sides of the road, just behind the hedges. These soldiers will come quickly along it. Let them lie on their breasts, and lie silent as the dead. Let the musketeers remain with me. When you hear the sound of our muskets—then, but not till then—dash at them with your pikes. For life or for death carry out these orders! Do you understand?"

Mehaul did understand. So, for the matter of that, did every man within listening distance. Its object, its intention, and its meaning were perfectly palpable to everyone. Those who did not hear were perfectly ready to obey orders coming—as they knew—from a capable head.

In less time than it could be expected—bearing out Mehaul's statement in the forge that Irishmen were all born soldiers—the pikemen had arrayed themselves on both sides of the high whin bushes that lined either sides of the rocky road, along which the oncoming troops should travel. The brows of the hill at each side of the road were covered by rocks and boulders, in the interstices of which grew rank grass, on which at other times goats browsed, but along which on such occasions as this, and with a straight road before them, no regular troops would have dreamt of travelling. The musketeers Watt kept with himself, visible on the side of the hill, whilst the remaining multitude seemed flying across the top of the hill in panic. As indeed, consisting as they did, of women and boys, they not only seemed but were in reality.

The first gleam of cold steel arising from the valley struck a sort of awe into those around. And as the assailants saw the flying multitudes on the hill, a disorganised rout, they rushed forward in enthusiastic cheering. Breaking from the regular orders of their ranks they rushed tumultuously up the hill. Up the hill road; and past the hedges; behind which, grim and silent as death, the pikemen lay prone on their faces, their hands nervously tightening on the ashen handles.

"Lie down boys. They will fire. Let their bullets go over you."

Watt's command was promptly obeyed. The handful of musketeers guarding the low hedge, which ran parallel to the brow of the hill and at right angles to the advance of the pursuers, lay down behind it. The advancing foe mistook their disappearance for retreat, and, firing a volley, charged upwards with the bayonet!

"Line the fence, boys, and fire on them, when you can just see the whites of their eyes!"

His order was obeyed. Creeping on their hands and face the men scattered rapidly apart, until each man had sufficient elbow room without crowding his fellows to fire at the advancing foe.

A few moments of breathless silence supervened. A few moments merely, but in the minds of the waiting men long enough to count as years.

They could hear the hurrahs of the advancing troops, growing nearer and nearer, until they almost seemed to be but a few yards at the other side of the hedge! Each moment they seemed to come nearer. They could readily distinguish the sound of their heavy boots on the hard rocky road outside!

Would the order never come? Were they to be bayonetted where they stood?

A few of the more impatient, with their left hand clutching the musket, and their right the dry grass of the hedge side, were lifting themselves up to get a peep across. They could hear the breathing of their panting and advancing foes!

"Stand up! men of Wexford. Sight your muskets and fire! Steady; be careful of aim. Don't lose a shot. Fire!"

In a heart's beat they were standing upright behind the hedge, their eyes glancing over it, their rifles pushed across.

Before them were the redcoats; in their ears was the ring of their impromptu leader's voice; in the hollow of their left hands the barrels of their rifles.

"Fire!"

A line of flame ran along the hedge; a burst of white smoke followed. From the front arose a cry of surprise, of horror, of death-agony!

The leading files had fallen before the merciless fire in the first volley, and before they could stay their on-rush those succeeding had tumbled over the foremost. Only for a minute, however, for in a brief space they were retreating in frantic disorder on the levelled bayonets of their supporters, who were, almost before they knew the cause, thrown into disarray.

At the same moment a cheer rang out along the road—a cheer of full long pent-up hate and vengeance. Stirred by the signal of the musketry of their brethren on the hill, the pikemen lining the hedges jumped to their feet, and, with pikes shortened in their hands for close action leaped the hedge into the lane.

The work of destruction had commenced!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ON OULART HILL.

THE cold gleam of steel burnished by the rays of the May sun shone over the ditch as the musketeers glanced along their rifles. Simultaneously with the crash of musketry, with the falling back in paralysed suspense of the head of the column, the pikemen leaped with the fleetness of tigers over the road fences at either side.

Cooped up as they were in the narrow lane the soldiers were fully exposed on either side to the assaults of the latter. The sudden shout and leap forward of their assailants utterly unnerved them. Before they had even time to think, or resolve, or form among themselves some common line of action, their vengeful opponents were over the hedge and upon them!

Climbing, clambering, leaping, falling across the whin bushes, the pikemen were beside them.

The conflict was short. The ready pikes of the insurgents, light and easily handled, strewed death among the North Cork. Old scores, long burned into their hearts, were wiped out. Every home thrust was attended by taunting cries.

"You'll not burn Cra-na-more again, you hound of a militiaman!"

"You've got your match now, an' not an ould man be the side of Cappamore!"

"Why don't you stand up an' fight now, you that speared my child last Monday!"

These exclamations and such as these rang over the deadly work going on in the crowded laneway.

Some of the militiamen, in their terror, like frightened hares, even ran through their assailants, burst across the hedges, and vainly sought shelter in the whin bushes and boulders of the hill-side. But escape was useless. Long provocation had maddened the hearts and quickened the eyes and hands of the insurgents, and the gleaming pike-blade, as it flashed in the calm light of the sun, shone with the blood of the slain soldiers.

Never was a trap so laid; never was revenge so full, so prompt, and so merciless.

Whilst this work was going on, Watt had spied at the further end of the lane their commander—spied him almost as soon as the smoke of their guns had wafted away.

"Mehaul," he said to his companion, who, gun in hand, stood beside him, "look yonder. Do you know him?"

"Yes," said Mehaul; "it's himself. I'd know his red face anywhere."

"Follow me, Mehaul. Don't load, you haven't time. Follow me."

Leaping lightly across the fence over which they had fired, Watt quickly made his way parallel to the lane in which the deadly scene was being enacted, and with he fleetness of a greyhound made his way through the boulders and bushes of the hill side.

In a few minutes he gained the brow of the hill just beside him.

So sudden was the onslaught that the officer—our red-faced friend of the court-martial and of other times—stood looking on in confusion at the scenes before him. So sudden was the onslaught, so thickly packed the furious mass of fighting, struggling men in the narrow way before him, that he could not exactly realise what was happening, or whether it was not the fact that his own men were dealing death on their foes, so furious, so passionate, so deadly the strife that reined therein.

So, sitting on horseback, he watched in half-dazed fashion the seething mass before him. The drummer boy was by his side.

As Watt's eyes rested on him he appeared for the first time to have realised the nature of the conflict going on before him. He was giving direction, apparently, to the bugler to sound the retreat, for in a moment more the shrill blast blew from the trumpet of the latter. For most of the soldiers who left Wexford a few hours before, gaily laughing over the vengeance they were going to inflict on their despised foes, and joking over the projected outrages they should inflict on the innocent girls of the country, the summons came too late. Other scenes and other sounds were in their ears, for many of them lay writhing in death agony, and many others had looked their last on the green earth and bright sky.

As Colonel Needham glanced around, the bugle-cry still ringing in his ears, his eyes rested on Watt as he ran swiftly below him on the brow of the hill to intercept him, Mehaul following, musket in hand, hard on his footstep.

That moment it flashed on him with the instinct of lightning what had happened. That instant his resolve was taken. In a second he had turned his horse's head around and was galloping down the hill, which a few moments before he had ascended—galloping, too, with a speed which showed the sudden fear that prompted him.

Mehaul had knelt on one knee, and with his musket, which he had managed to load as he ran, levelled at his shoulder, prepared to pay off old scores.

"Don't, man—don't I say," shouted Watt, as he struck the levelled musket down with the end of his pike. "It is not his death I want—it is his life."

The gun belched forth its charge, which struck against the ditch. In the middle of the smoke that filled the air, Watt swiftly leaped the fence and stood immediately before the retreating horseman.

"Stand and surrender!"

The scared and flying horseman heard not his words, or, if he did, his panic was too great to allow him to heed them.

Against the point of the upraised pike he spurred his horse, which, the latter being thoroughly game, leaped with the impulse of the spur.

A quick thrust of the pike at the rider—aimlessly made in the sudden speed—and the next moment Watt o' the Crosses rolled on his back, his foot slipping under him, and the horseman, bounding over and past him, was soon out of sight, followed by the drummer.

The fall which Watt had sustained was a heavy one, and as he reeled to his feet his eyes swam and his head grew dizzy.

"Is he gone, Mehaul?"

"Gone!" said the latter; "to be sure he's gone. May all bad luck and ill-fortune go with him. Why did you stop my hand?"

"Gone! Is he gone?"

"Ma churp an dhoul, but he is. Gone to do more divilment and mischief among the poor crathurs of people. An' you—you of all men, Watt o' the Crosses—to stop me. I ax you again, why did you do it?"

Mehaul's attitude and voice were full of anger and threatening. His long pent-up passion and vengeance were heated to madness, and the escape of the hated enemy seemed to have turned his head.

"I thought," said Watt, as he partially recovered himself, "I could have taken him prisoner, and—and learned about Grace."

"Oh, was that it? God help you, Watt" (relaxing, compassionately), "shure if I'd known that I could have disabled him fast enough without killin' him, and then we'd have larnt what he could tell."

"He couldn't be overtaken?" asked Watt despairingly.

"Overtaken!" said Mehaul contemptuously. "He's

half-way in Wexford by this. Even if he was here he couldn't tell a word. He knows no more nor you an' me."

"Why——"

"We haven't time to talk over this now. Are you strong enough to walk? Do you hear that?"

As he spoke a cheer ran along the hill-side—a cheer, so full of hate, and rage, and triumph, that it seemed, in the intensity of its feelings, to make the very stones and rocks of the hill-side ring back its echoes. They proceeded back by the way they had come, Watt hastening, and Mehaul helping him forward as quickly as he could.

Arrived at the fence, the gathering multitude told its tale. The reddened spear blades and the maddened infuriated faces were speakers powerful enough.

The regiment of the North Cork Militia had atoned for their cruelties on the people with their blood. Their corpses lay thick in the bush-enclosed lane, and where they had burst from their self-selected prison, the hill-sides lay dotted with their bodies.

A loud cheer rang as the new leader appeared amongst them. Never had a revolutionary leader in the early days of the French successes received such an ovation after one of their hardly won conflicts.

"Hurrah! Watt o' the Crosses!"

"Ireland for ever! and our own leader!"

"Death to the oppressors of the people, and heaven protect Ireland and Wexford!"

Such were the cries of the victorious pikemen crowding around him, the first taste of victory and success showing itself in the knotted muscles of their bare arms and foreheads and in their hoarse vociferations.

A hand was laid on his shoulder, as the excited pikemen crowded around him.

"It was God that brought you hither," said Father John, as he clasped him heartily by the hand. "Even as God brought Moses to the hill-side of old to bring His oppressed people from slavery, so I trust He has guided you here to deliver His distressed people from the hands of its oppressors. What would you advise us to do now, under the influence of this heaven-sent triumph?"

"It is I that need your advice, Father John!" said Watt,

whose mind was again agonised for the safety of his love, and for the horrors she was likely to suffer under the disturbed state of things that had grown up.

"And what is that, my son? If your heart is burthened with——"

"It is not that, Father John," said Watt, taking him away from the cheering crowd of excited men, and explaining in as few words as he could the nature of the anxieties that possessed him.

"Grace Cottrell! my son. Why need you fret for her? She is quite safe. I saw her yesterday."

"Saw her yesterday, Father John! Where?" said Watt in ecstacy.

"I fear to tell you. But your good heart and bravery and faith to my poor people to-day compels me. She is at Kilbremmer with Colonel Victor's family."

"With Colonel Victor's family," said Watt, as his head reeled with sudden delight—"and safe."

"Perfectly safe, my son. She could not be otherwise and be in that good gentleman's household. Would to God there were many like him, and a pike had never been reddened on the hill of Oulart."

"I must see her—see her at once," said Watt.

"Impossible. It is out of the question, Watt o' the Crosses. Your presence is too valuable for the guardianship of these poor fellows. What would they do without you? Remember, you are now fighting for Ireland—and for freedom!"

"I know, Father John. But I will not the less aid them with my humble assistance for that my mind shall be at rest. I cannot rest without seeing her. I have a great deal to say to her."

"I dare not give you permission, even if I could. God has entrusted the guidance of my people—of His people—into your hands, and it would be a thwarting of His will for you to leave. The victory, the crowning, the unspeakable victory of the past few minutes shows this."

"It is only a short distance. I shall not be long away. There is no danger of another attack to-day. The panic will not be on our side but on theirs. I shall be back again on the hill of Oulart before the sun goes down."

"If I thought so——"

"I tell you Father John, it is so; and will be so. I am powerless for any good here, even to think, or reflect, or plan, until my mind is made easy."

"In that case, I suppose you had better go, though there is a heavy sense of responsibility weighing on me in even giving you this permission."

"Trust me, Father John, to bear out my words. My lot is thrown in, heaven knows, unexpectedly enough, among my countrymen, and, for weal or woe, I mean to stand by them. But my mind must be at rest; I can do nothing in the cloud of uncertainty that pervades me."

"Well, then, go, my child. God will guide you. Who will you take with you?"

"I shall take Mehaul," said Watt, "he has shown him self trustworthy as——But what is the meaning of this?"

As he spoke, a movement was taking place on the summit of the hill. A rush of people in wild confusion—mainly of women and boys—appeared thereon, coming in their direction. At the same moment a forward rush from the pikemen in that immediate vicinity in the opposite direction, attracted his attention, to be succeeded by a burst of defiant cheering.

"What can this be?" asked Father John, as the cheering was again taken up around them.

A low sound coming along through the crowd, transmitted from one to the other in waves, like a passing breeze, soon communicated the reason to them. It was comprised in one word—

"Cavalry!"

"Where?" burst with one accord from the lips of those assembled around.

The answer was soon given. The horsemen were advancing to attack them from the other side of the hill. With one accord they ran there.

Below them, on a winding road to the left, appeared the cause of the commotion. A large body of cavalry, whose helmets and accoutrements flashed like gold in the sun, were advancing slowly.

They had been detailed probably to cut off the retreat of the insurgents when the bayonets of the North Cork had driven them from the hill.

Evidently they were somewhat perplexed to find the insurgents still retaining this position, and with no present manifestation of retreat—for, as they came within musket shot of the hill, they paused and remained stationary. The scene was very fine. The summer sun shone on the glistening array; and as the horses, tired of remaining stationary, changed and moved, each portion of the harness shifted in the changing light, nodding helmet and naked sword gave back the sun's rays with ever varying effect. The long line of red uniforms through the green hedges was not the least pleasant portion of the scene presented to them.

For some time the horsemen remained stationary, and in a resting posture—evidently waiting for the moment when they should hear the ring of their comrades' rifles, and their huzzas as they swept the crowd of insurgents from the hill and within reach of their sabres.

They did not know that the North Cork had strewn the approaches with their bodies; that the deadly pike, wielded by furious and enraged hands, had left not one to tell the tale of the defeat, save the leader and his drummer boy. They could not, in fact, dream that victory so sudden, so unexpected, so overwhelming, had arranged itself at once on the side of the unarmed insurgents.

That something unusual had occurred, or was occurring. became by slow degrees, however, palpable to the long lines of horsemen.

Probably the gleaming of white-handled pikes on the hill, the waving of handkerchiefs, and the fierce cheers of defiance that greeted them, forewarned them that something untoward had happened, for a halting and hesitating movement seemed to run through the ranks.

"Mehaul," said Murrough as he strode forward, his pike shortened in his hand. "It is a pity to let those fellows go back."

"I have been thinkin' that myself," said Mehaul. "What do you say, Watt?" added he, turning to the latter. "These are the scoundrels who have unroofed half the houses in Wexford—these are the villains who can gallop into a farmer's house, light the thatched roof, an' then gallop off, lavin' the light of the creature's burnin' house to light 'em on their way."

These words hissed through the speaker's teeth, and as Watt glanced at him he was surprised to see through the usually calm and quiet features of the blacksmith, the amount of concentrated hate, passion and vengeance that showed itself. The long pent-up wrath had at last overflowed its boundaries and raged unslaked in all the wildness of avenging passion. It seemed to grow and burn as he gazed on the horsemen in the valley.

"What way do they go back?"

"By the cross-roads of Kilbremmer—under Colonel Victor's demesne walls," said Father John, now for the first time speaking.

"Yes," said Mehaul, "and we can aisy take a short cut, an' get there afore 'em."

"You think so?" said Watt as he took a short survey of the ground.

"I'm certain of it," Not a man iv 'em 'll go to Wexford alive if we get afore 'em there."

"Very well, Mehaul; get me as many as you think right. A few musketeers and pikemen. We shall try the mettle of these swordsmen."

The men were soon at his call.

"Who knows the way best? The short cut I mean. You Murrough?"

"Aye, all ov us. Everyone knows id."

"Very well; step out now. We shall be back again as soon as we can."

Filing out from the rest, the men, with Mehaul at their head, silently and swiftly descended, in single file, from the hill, Watt and Murrough bringing up the rere, and, with rapid strides, were soon crossing the fields in the direction suggested.

Meantime the horsemen had grown alarmed. Hearing nothing to indicate the advance of the North Cork from the other side; suspecting, from the enthusiastic bursts of cheering that met them from the hill-side, that something untoward had happened; and, alarmed by the sudden descent of a body of pikemen down the hill, who could not help, in their anxiety to get into action with them, breaking the orders of Father John; the cavalry discharged a few carbine shots, and retreated.

The bugle-call for the retreat fell on the ears of the body of men hastening in single file to intercept them.

"We are late," said Murrough. "They are off."

"The bugle is sounding the retreat. Shall we be able to get before them?"

"It is only a chance. We must go faster."

"Pass the word 'faster,' then."

But there was no occasion to do so. Mehaul had heard the bugle sound too, and, promptly by the furious hate that filled him, had at once started on a run, in which he was followed by the rest; and in a second or two the long single file was crossing the marshy ground, faster than ever Indians on the war trail advanced on their foes.

"They're gone," shouted Mehaul in tones of agony, as, the first to ascend a rising knoll that had shut out their view, he saw the helmets disappearing in the distance at a smart trot, past the place where they hoped to intercept them.

In a second or two more the whole body stood beside the speaker on the hill.

The soldiers were indeed gone! They had escaped the trap laid for them. Through the trees that lined the road far beyond the spot destined for their ambush their bright helmets and red coats could be seen as they rose and fell with the canter of their horses.

"May the devil fly away with them!" ejaculated Mehaul, as a groan of disappointed rage rose from the crowd around him.

"They're safe this time, anyway," said another in deep vexation.

"We'll never get so good a chance at 'em again," said a third. "It's long till you see 'em as far outside the town of Wexford again."

"By heaven," said Mehaul, who had been listening attentively to the sound of their retreating steps, and watching the cloud of dust they raised in their retreat, until they disappeared in a valley in the distance, "if we've missed 'em they must have met some others. I hear muskets goin'. Listen!"

A dead silence reigned over the group as they listened attentively.

"You're right, there," said a young fellow who had thrown

himself down with his ear to the ground. "You're right, Mehaul! You heard muskets, shure enough, bud it's not the redcoats that's just gone that's firin'."

"Where, Shaymus, where else?" asked several, crowding quickly around the new speaker.

"It's at Kilbremmer. It's at Colonel Victor's the shootin' is. There's where the fightin' is goin' on. I can hear id as ready as if I was there. An' heavy shootin' too."

The dull boom of volleys did, indeed, as they listened, seem to come feebly on the breeze. For a second or two only, however, for the words of Shaymus stirred at once the pulses of Watt's heart in another direction.

Kilbremmer! Colonel Victor's! Why that was the place where Grace Cottrell was. That was where he had made up his mind to go, when the disappointing incident just over had occurred. Could it be possible the place was attacked? Could it be posssible that she was in danger?

Without a moment's further hesitation his mind was made up. The volleys of musketry rose still in intermittent bursts on the ear, accompanied by faint cheers.

"We must see what this is," said Mehaul. "There's something goin' on there."

"We must go there."

"We must, faix. There's somethin' sthrange goin' on. There's heavy fightin' there."

"Push on, then, Mehaul. Push on, in the name of God!"

The men's minds were excited. They were filled with disappointment at the escape of the horsemen, and the noise of the fighting coming on their ears sent a shiver of impatience through them.

No sooner was the word given to them than in a sling trot they proceeded in the direction of Colonel Victor's, passing the intervening fields to the road, swiftly climbing the high park wall, and advancing through the wooded demesne to the house.

As they came in view of the front, a strange sight met their eyes. In front of the house, and sheltering behind drays and felled trees, were a number of countrymen firing steadily at the windows.

The puffs of smoke from the latter in quick and repeated succession, sometimes amounting to a volley, showed that

the mansion was well defended. Here and there on the lawn extended figures showed where the fire had taken effect, and where some of the insurgents had fallen.

This state of thing had apparently been going on for some time; and it was evident that the insurgents had tired of their losses, and had grown impatient of the defence offered; for just as Watt appeared on the scene, a pair of drays tied together and laden with packs of wool and feather beds from the neighbouring farmer's houses, was being pushed, in face of the fire from the windows, up the gravel way.

Under shelter of this, and protected by it from the musketry from the windows, a number of men advanced behind, armed, curiously, as Watt thought, with buckets and bundles of wood.

Amid the spluttering fire from behind the drays and trees, accompanied by a hoarse cheer, as some shot told with effect on the defenders, the dray, with its load and followers, was pushed up towards the hall-door.

All this took place even while he looked. He had barely time to learn, in some incongruous way—how, he could scarcely tell—what was happening. It was this. A detachment of soldiers, unknowing of the insurrection, had been scouring the country for arms, and in the absence of the male population committing the usual atrocities, when they heard the sounds of muskets from Oulart Hill. At the same moment a party of armed country people coming to join their brothers thereon, had come in sight. The detachment of soldiers, taking alarm, had retreated upon Colonel Victor's, where they rapidly entrenched themselves. And thither also the armed insurgents had promptly pursued them, and had commenced an attack on the entrenched troops.

Almost whilst this intelligence was being conveyed to him a heavy shock and a hoarse cheer burst on his ears.

A cloud of smoke obscured the front of the house.

"They have blown in the door," thought Watt.

He must have been speaking aloud, for a voice in his ear immediately said.

"They've done more than that, for they've fired the house! See the flames already bursting out in the hall! By heaven!"

Even amid the excitement that surrounded him, the voice struck Watt as being familiar. He turned his head around. Traveller No. 1 stood beside him!

"What, you here?"

"My fellow traveller—my fellow traveller! Watt o' the Crosses!"

"What brings you here?"

"Heaven knows, Misfortune!"

"So you escaped the sentence?"

"For which I know how much I am indebted to you. But there is no time for talking. Look yonder! The house is on fire!"

On fire indeed it was. The red blaze, even through the summer evening, shone fiercely through the blown-in door, throwing outside its forked tongues, which speedily caught up others in the windows, and wreathed the front of the house in intermittent sheets of flame.

A cry of vengeance, hoarse, passionate, and deadly, rose from the insurgents, now, in the glow of their success and triumph, abandoning their sheltered positions and advancing recklessly into the open. At the same moment a rush was made to rereward of the house. Evidently the soldiers, beaten from their position by the fire at the windows, had rushed to the rere of the house, and thither the infuriated people had rushed also to prevent their escaping. The long pent-up torments and hatred and sufferings of the past weary months were now to be avenged, and not one of them should escape. Each insurgent had some grievous wrong to redress; each pikeman's heart therefore swelled with relentless vengeance.

"The family—the ladies!" shouted his friend, rushing past Watt in lightning speed and making for the house.

"Where? where?" shouted Watt in breathless terror.

But before his friend, even if he had time in his swift rush forward, could answer the question his eye alighted on an upper window in the mansion which the blaze had yet failed to reach. The light summer dresses of ladies in strong relief against the dark glass were plainly visible, crowding together. In a few minutes the roaring flames (the smell of the burning woodwork came visibly over the intervening space) would reach them—would reach them with deadly effect.

They were the ladies of the house. With them, no doubt, was Grace Cottrell. Oh, heaven! was this, then, the end of all? Had the long years of warring exile, the building up of name and fame to make her bright eyes brighter, and bring to her handsome face the rosy colour of rejoicing, and to her lips the smile of triumph and pleasure—was this horrible scene to be the recompense of all?

Some such thoughts as these flashed with more than lightning rapidity through his mind, as for a second his eye took in the scene before him.

Then abandoning all thoughts—abandoning thought itself, he flew forward. He leaped to the sill of the first window, over the fosse that lay between, and with one tremendous fling of his frame against it smashed it bodily inwards. Undeterred by the leaping flames that shot towards him through the open space and air he leaped forward. Through the drawingroom, through the hall! all filled with flame and smothering smoke—smothering, suffocating smoke.

The staircase lay before him. Its marble felt cold and grateful to his burning hand, heated as it was. Down far beneath lay the fountain playing, amid the ruin and wreck that was swiftly encompassing it.

This and all he took notice of in the instant of leaping upwards. Upwards! for there amid the flames gathering was the one dearest to him in the world, with whose brightness beside him the dreariest places of the world were heaven, without which earth was worse than hell!

With rapid steps he was leaping upwards, when all of a sudden a thunderbolt seemed to have burst from the sky, else an earthquake must have leaped upwards, carrying ruin and destruction in its sudden rush; for the stair and the floor, and the very earth beneath him, seemed to tremble with the unsteadiness of chopping waves; a burst of thunder seemed to fill his ears and the universe; a red flash of light, dwindling the light of the burning house into a pallid flame, and bursting at one and the same moment from every chink and crevice, and door and passage, and window, struck upon his eyes!

A sudden sense of falling—with the ruin of the house, nay, of the world, falling with him; and the light died from out his eyes and consciousness from his brain!

CHAPTER XXIX.

AFTER THE FIGHT.

THE bright day must have sunk into night, for when Watt awoke, the blackness of midnight was around him.

A form seemed to be moving beside where he lay.

"Where am I?" he asked.

"An' musha, have you recovered your sinses at last? Sure it's well an' safe you are, glory be to God for the same! But don't spake too loud, achorra, for you wouldn't know who might be near."

"Where am I?"

"Musha, an' is it where you are you'd be axin'?" The words were spoken in a kindly girl's voice, and almost at once Watt remembered that they had been familiar to him for a long time. "Don't ax any questions at all about it, honey darlint, but take this."

She proffered him a draught. The darkness had become sufficiently familiar to him, even in the few minutes of time since he recovered himself, to enable him to see the girl's form and the cup which she carried in her hands.

"Who are you?" he asked, as he slowly drained the refreshing liquor which she held to his lips. "I am very tired. I must have been some hours here. It was the afternoon when I came; it is now, I think," as he wearily stirred himself, "near midnight?"

"Musha, aroon, an' God help us all! Sure it's many is the evenin' and the midnight came since you lay here first."

"How long have I been here?" he asked, as a new sense of something extraordinary having happened seemed to give fresh vitality to his frame. "Have I been longer than this afternoon?"

"The afthernoon, asthore-machree! Faix, an' it's nearer to a score ov 'em have passed over your head since you lay here; an' never one but my own four bones to know you or attend on you."

"Twenty days!" said the patient with a start as he sat up with an effort in the bed, which he now saw had been

made for him in one corner of the apartment, which otherwise was strewn and covered with *debris* of all kinds. "That cannot be—twenty days!"

"It's thrue enough, alanna. Don't worry yourself; you're not sthrong enough. Lie down agin, an' rest yourself for a bit longer."

"Where is Grace—Grace Cottrell?" he asked in alarm, unheeding the kindliness of her advice.

"Who knows, honey?"

"Who knows?" echoed the patient. "Was she not here to-day?"

"Troth and no she wasn't. The never a wan has been here since the place was burnt, barrin' the bats, but yourself and meself."

"An' where is Mehaul an' Father John? Where are they all?" he asked, forgetting that the occurrences in which he had taken part were now many days elapsed.

"It would be a wise man would tell, for except sometimes the sogers comin' ridin' by, and sometimes the croppies, the sorra sowl is to be seen around here for days upon days."

The patient lay back lost in overwhelming reflection, as it by degrees dawned on him that he had been wounded and abandoned. But his impatience was too great to allow him to rest long, and so he quickly lifted himself again to a sitting posture.

The place seemed to be brighter to his eyes as he did so. A slender stream of light coming in by a broken doorway, which seemed indeed to have made ingress thereat only after traversing many corners and outer entrances, gave some additional light. This his recovering sight soon discovered. Also that the girl who had been his answerer was standing over against the wall in the gloom, and seemed to be crying.

"See, my girl!—what shall I call you?"

"Nisthaus," said the girl, interrupting a fit of weeping, and drying her eyes with her apron.

"Well, Nisthaus, I'm obliged to you for your kindness—how deeply I cannot say at present. But you will add to your kindness by helping me to get out of this. There are others dearer to me than my own life whom I must——"

A sudden interruption of the light, and he was alone. The girl had passed suddenly out through the entrance. In a moment more the light re-entered again. But again also it was interrupted, and the girl was once more beside him.

"Hush! for God's sake, hush!" she said in a frenzied whisper, as he motioned again to speak. "They're out side, an' they'll kill you if they find you."

"Who are outside, Nisthaus?" he asked in a whisper.

"The sojers."

"The soldiers, Nisthaus?"

"Yes, the sojers. For God's sake don't speak. I heard talkin', and I went to peep out through the fallen walls, an' there they wor."

The girl's voice had sunk into the faintest trembling whisper as she spoke.

But her whispers had scarcely reached his ear, when louder voices reached them from outside, accompanied by the noise of feet walking over rough ways, and stumbling as it were over fallen obstacles.

Whilst the girl placed her hand on his mouth in her fear, to prevent him speaking, the words of the advancing parties came more distinctly on his ears.

"It is doubtful if it could be true: you must have been misinformed. It is impossible," said a voice.

"It looks like it enough, unfortunately" said a second speaker. "But we must try."

"Try—try where? Not even a wild bird could live here for a day after the occurrence, much less for nigh twenty days.

"Patience, patience" said the other. "It is hard to take some men's lives and his was one of them. What interest could anyone have in misinforming me? Let us try. Patience—a little longer."

"Well, be it so," the second speaker said with impatient acquiescence.

"I think I know these voices," thought Watt o' the Crosses as he duly listened. "Yes, I am sure I do," he continued starting up as the voices repeated themselves.

He listened a little further, but the voices ceased and the footsteps died out.

"They are going away—oh heaven!" he thought "if I should be left alone here."

Then aloud—in spite of Nisthaus's efforts to prevent him.

"Dick—Dick-na-Raheen! I am here—Watt o' the Crosses!"

But his voice seemed to echo in cavernous depths, for it appeared to be caught up and returned by the fallen masses of stones and charred timbers that strewed the apartment and bounded it.

He lay back exhausted with the effort.

"Dick, Dick-na-Raheen, honey! Don't talk that a-way. Shure Dick-na-Raheen went to his judgment four years ago. Alanna, asthore, you have not recovered your sinses yet. An' honey, it's not Dick himself that's gone, but every livin' sowl in it, or that was in it, for there's not a scollop of thatch on the house, nor a roof-tree on the wall plate—they wor burnt down days ago. And faix, honey, boy, unless the wild cat sittin' where the hearthstone used to be there's not a livin' thing in Knock-raheen, nor a place to shelter id if there wor."

Watt's exhausted attention failing to catch the first words had heard the last. They quickened his attention, and divided it with the late voices that had now died out and passed away.

"What's that you say, Nisthaus? Knock-raheen burned? No."

"Faix, an' it is, every scallop and roof-tree. There's nothing now but the blackened walls."

"Who did it?"

"'Torney Gordon and the Yeos."

"'Torney Gordon! Who said so?"

"Faix, an' sure I say id, that knows id, honey. Didn't I live in the house? Wasn't I there for many years? And sure who'd know id if id wasn't I?"

"Why, Nisthaus, now that I think of it, surely I remember your face. I couldn't tell before where I had seen you. Yes, yes, now I remember, How glad I am to see you, Nisthaus!"

If it were a veritable demon coming straight from Hades, instead of a soft, gentle, blue-eyed young girl, that brought news of Knock-Raheen, Watt would have made him welcome, so overwhelming, so devouring, was his eagerness to hear what had occurred.

"Aye, sure, many a time we talked ov you, whin nobody knew what bekeme ov you. An' sure it's the quare feelin' kem over myself when I recovered myself here, after the fightin' an' the shootin' was over, to find you lyin' undher the hapes of beams an' bricks an' rubbish. It nearly took the life out ov me when I took 'em all off you and found who was in id."

"And we have been alone here since, Nisthaus?"

"An' shure we have, honey. Only I crept out at night to get what I could among the empty farmers' houses for you. For, honey, love," said Nisthaus, shuddering, "between the sojers gallopin' by one day, burnin' and tearin' and shootin' everything they can see, and the poor boys comin' around next day, or maybe hotfut afther 'em, the sorra wan's chance ov life there iz at all."

The girl cried and shuddered.

"And Knock-raheen, Nisthaus; what about Knock-raheen. What's that you said about Mr. Gordon?"

"'Torney Gordon, is it you mean? Oh, bad success to him; sure it's he brought the misfortune on us all. Whin Miss Grace, poor girl, wouldn't have him——"

"And she would not have him?" interrupted Watt.

"Sorra bit; afther the fit of sickness she had on Christmas Day she never could bear the sight ov 'im. An' sign's ov id, when she was taken away to Waxford by him an' brought back here, acushla, by the young Englishman an' Colonel Victor unknownst to us all, forbye none of us knew ov id, sorra bit but he thought she kem back again to Knock-raheen."

"And so, Nisthaus," said Watt, raising himself on his elbow in his excitement, "it was the young Englishman and Colonel Victor that rescued Grace?"

"Thrue for you, honey, that was the very way ov id. An' so, thinkin' she was at Knock-raheen some time afther—I don't know how long, my head is wandherin', afther the past three weeks—he kem again one night wid the Yeos to look for her; and not findin' her, sorra stick or stone that wasn't left by the fire was left in the place. He's turned out now one ov the biggest villains ov' em all."

"An' so Knock-raheen is burnt," said Watt, in deep thought.

"Throth, Dick, God forgive the poor boy his sins and give him the light ov glory, if he wor to kum back he wouldn't know id. It's the changest place ever was. Murrough said——" ..

"Aye, Murrough," said Watt eagerly. "What of him?"

"Alanna coorra, he died on the Bridge ov Enniscorthy."

"The Bridge of Enniscorthy!" said Watt.

"Aye, aroon; there's where the big fightin' was since you lay here. But the boys won id, and Murrough died on the bridge. So I'm tould, for I wasn't able to go there. But I knew, honey," said Nisthaus crying bitterly, "how well he liked you all the while, when nobody could tell where you wor, and whin——"

"Hush! I hear voices. Listen, Nisthaus! Do you hear anything?"

Nisthaus ceased her weeping discourse, and, once again drying her eyes with her apron, listened attentively.

"They are coming back, I trust in kind heaven," thought Watt, whose mind was diverted from thoughts of them by the supreme interest of the news he had been listening to.

"No, I don't hear anything," said Nisthaus.

"I am sure I did."

"Alanna, your mind is wake still."

"I don't think it's that, Nisthaus," added he, "these voices you heard a few minutes ago were dear friends of mine. They will save me—they will save us both. Could you call to them?"

"Achorra, no. God forgive you for thinkin' av id! Sure they're the sojers. Didn't I see their red jackets? Ah! sure, poor boy, it's your life they'd take afore they'd lave the place if they knew you wor here."

"I tell you no, Nisthaus."

"Aroon, you have not seen what I saw while you wor tossin' and moanin' in the gloom. Faix it's their swords and bayonets red wid the blood of women and children I saw many a time afore the door outside. An' they'd no more think of sparing you——"

"But about Grace, Nisthaus; and Murrough, what——"

"Aye, faix, sure enough," said the young girl as the tears flowed from her eyes when the subject nearest her heart was

mentioned. "We wor to be married this summer—but it's the cruel summer it has turned out to be."

"And Grace—heaven help the dear girl!—have you any idea of where *she* is?"

"Sorra wan of me knows. They wor here the mornin' of the fightin'; but what bekem of 'em afther——"

"Nisthaus! I hear the voices again! Listen! They are friends of mine. Call to them?"

"No, alanna, no. You don't know who they might be."

"Oh, yes, Nisthaus. I hear them for some minutes past. I shall call to them! Dick-na-Raheen!" shouted Watt o' the Crosses, as loud as his weak voice would permit him.

"The crathur hasn't lost the faver out ov him yet. God help him," said Nisthaus in terror.

In a second or two the tramp and tread of clambering footsteps came over the obstacles that lay in their way.

Watt's heart leaped with pleasure as he heard the struggling efforts of many feet to clamber over the fallen *debris*, and to reach them. Once more he would see his old friends! Once more he should hear how matters had been proceeding during his illness!—but, above all, once more he would hear of Grace. Grace, whose bright eyes and radiant face seemed at this moment a likeness of the dwellers in Paradise! He lay back in faintness, overcome by the sensations of so suddenly meeting his old friends and hearing their voices; and in the moment of weakness closed his eyes and lay still to let the fainting symptoms pass.

The footsteps drew nearer—had clambered over the rubbish; had reached the outer apartment—had reached the doorway—had entered.

A hand was laid on his shoulder. The touch woke to life his dormant faculties.

He opened his eyes and extended his hand.

"Dick my old——'

But instead of the kindly greeting, his voice broke off short; for over him, as he opened his eyes, stood the form of Mr. Birchwood Gordon; and beside *him* again, Colonel Needham!

CHAPTER XXX.

OLD ACQUAINTANCES GATHER.

THE warning cry of Nisthaus came on his ear almost at the same time that his eye lighted on his new visitors.

For a moment Watt o' the Crosses gazed on them as they stood looking in triumph down upon him. Possibly it was that sinister and singular look of triumph despite the girl's warning cry, that conjured up the old brave spirit into his heart.

"Well?" he said, breaking the silence, as soon as his eye for a moment closed in astonishment, opened again. "Well?"

"I told you you would find him here."

The words came from Birchwood Gordon, not in reply to his query, but in confident and triumphant assurance to his companion.

"And you were right."

"Of course I was. She was seen here, coming and going during the night-time, and I knew there must be someone a-hiding here. And I guessed who it was—and was I not right?"

"Quite right. He has had a long escape, but it is nearly over now."

During this brief discussion Watt had been listening coolly. Truth was, he saw now, that the end had come, and gathered himself with strength to face it.

"Well?" he queried again, as the speaker ceased and looked down upon him.

"Watt o' the Crosses, otherwise Colonel Malone."

"No; not otherwise—both," said the patient with a droll smile, as certain thoughts flashed across his mind.

"And an escaped prisoner—a runaway felon, too," added Colonel Needham, who had just spoken; "a runaway convict from Wexford jail."

The grim triumph that was on his face was matched by the laugh of his companion.

"Well, yes—a runaway, if you like it, certainly—of which no one has better reason to remember than you. But,"

said Watt—taking no notice of the darkening face of the other at the reminiscence—" the marks which you bear on your face at present would not have occasioned you much regret if you had not made good your retreat at Oulart Hill. I believe you had not many companions."

His words, spoken coolly, reminded the Colonel of his treatment on the barrack-square at Wexford. Further—and what was almost worse—reminded him of his cowardly retreat on that memorable Sunday, when he—and he almost alone—escaped.

Angered to intense passion by the prisoner's insult, he quivered with frightful excitement. What had happened at Wexford was public; his cowardice at Oulart was known only to himself and the speaker before him.

In the spur of the moment he drew his pistol, cocked the trigger, and was hurriedly presenting it.

Before he could do so, however, Nisthaus, starting forward, had thrown her shawl over the weapon and his arms, completely hindering his attempt, whilst her shriek rose wild and terrifying on their ears.

" You villain ! would you shoot the sick boy ? murderers ! —would you kill him ! Help ! Help ! "

The last exclamations were caused by the sudden clutch of Mr. Gordon on her throat. He had—as how could he else ?—seen her quick attempt to prevent his companion's effort and to save his rival, and he had hurriedly caught her, and, with his hand against her throat, pressed her against the wall. But not sufficiently so to prevent her cries, her half-choking cries, ringing frenziedly through the ruined buildings !

Tearing away the shawl which muffled his hands and arms, Colonel Needham dropped the pistol accidentally. In his hurry, and without waiting to pick it up, he drew from his side the short dagger that hung thereat.

Watt had watched what had been going on, had watched his movements in especial—had striven to lift himself out of the straw mattress on which he lay—but at the first effort had found that his attempts were fruitless, that he had overtasked his strength and was weak, inert, and powerless.

The gleam of the uplifted steel shone even in the gloom of the apartment. The few struggling rays that made

entrance from the tortuous passages outside were reflected back from its sides of burnished sheen.

For a moment only it was upraised, and was about to descend on the breast of the invalid.

"Cowardly villain! would you strike a helpless man? Murderer and coward!——"

His words were smothered in the quick report of shots outside and in the fierce cries of contending men that broke with marvellous swiftness on his ears.

It came with the same effect of instant surprise on all assembled in the room.

The dagger, in the face of the new alarm, was stayed in its descent and swiftly replaced in its scabbard, whilst Nisthaus, bursting from the hold of Mr. Gordon, shouted at the top of her voice.

"Murder—help! help! They are killing us here."

Her voice rang shrilly and unrestrainedly through the room, filling its small compartment and the passages outside, where still the noise of struggling men grew into louder din. Birchwood Gordon, startled for an instant by her shrieks, with one hand on her throat, and the other on her mouth sought to restrain her. But the nearness of help brought unwonted strength to the girl's hands, and freeing herself from his grasp, she poured forth her cries in rapid succession.

Abandoning their position, the two intruders swiftly left the apartment, disappearing behind one of the fallen buttresses.

The furious cries that rose on the air outside, the noise of clashing weapons and dropping shots ceased by degrees, and as they did, Nisthaus's cries became more audible to those outside.

In a moment after they heard voices and feet coming along.

A cry of delight burst from Nisthaus.

"It's our own boys—comin' to save us," she exclaimed. "Honey, we're saved!—saved from the villains."

It was, indeed, friends, and most unexpectedly that had turned up. For in the opening, almost as soon as she spoke, with a hatchet on his shoulder, and his arms bare, appeared Mehaul. And with him Murrough—a broken pike-staff in his hand.

A cry of delight and love and intense surprise burst from the lips of Nisthaus, as she laid eyes on the latter, whom she had mourned for as dead on the bloody day of Enniscorthy. A similar exclamation of delight and surprise, though not so loud or so vehement, came from Murrough, and in a moment she was in his arms.

"What in the world brought you here, Nisthaus?"

"Faix, I was here that day of the fightin', and whin the house blew up I escaped."

"An' why did you not come away, Nisthaus?"

"It's little able to go I was," said Nisthaus with a gleam of intense joy and affection in her eyes, "it's little able I was to go anywhere I was so hurt an' crushed. An' whin I listened behind the hedges to the nabours marchin' to Carrigbyrne, or Corbethill, an' heard 'em tell that you were killed at Enniscorthy, what had I to go for, or where was I to go? An' only for this poor boy——"

"Well, I'm worth two dead men yet, anyhow, Nisthaus," said Murrough, giving her a hug that made ample atonement for the frights and terrors of the past two days. "But who is this here? Who is this Mehaul is talkin' to?"

"Ah, the poor fellow! Sure it's only by mindin' ov him I was able to recover at all."

"Who is it?"

"Who, who would it be but himself, Watt o' the Crosses, Grace's ould——"

The light in his eyes, and perhaps the excitement he was in, had prevented Murrough from seeing clearly in the darkened apartment.

"Watt o' the Crosses!" he said aloud, and the next moment had abandoned Nisthaus and was by the side of the patient.

"It's not posssible that it is you that's here, Watt?"

"It is indeed—what is left of me," said Watt with a bright look of welcome.

"I thought you were crushed under the house when it blew up," said Murrough, in a voice trembling with affection and surprise.

"Well, so I was for anything I remember—hidden away at any rate."

"Because we searched for you as well as we could for

more than an hour, and could find no tidings of you. I didn't think a wild bird could have survived it. And then we were all pushing on to Enniscorthy, and——"

"What has become of Grace, Murrough?" asked Watt interrupting him.

"I don't know, Watt."

"Is there no one can tell me what has become of her?" asked Watt in a tone of vexation. "Is she alive? Was she not in the burning house that day?"

"No," said Murrough, "she was not. The family and herself had gone at dawn to Ross for shelter. And there they are still, for anything that I know. But we will soon know."

"Why—how?"

"Because we are marching there straight. We are going to capture it without delay."

"Then," said Watt, his eye brightening, "I'll go with you."

"Faix, an' av coorse you'll go wid us," said Murrough. "It isn't here you'd be goin' to stay, an' every good man and true, wid Waxford blood in his veins, facin' for Ross and the Three Bullet Gate."

"I am afraid I cannot be of much use——"

"Tut, tut, Watt, sure you can look on an' give advice! Sorra a finer sight ever you saw in France, than to see our boys wid the pikes in their hands, as gay as if they wor at a hurlin' match, clearin' the defences, and carryin' the town."

"I am afraid that's all I can do. Even now, before you came, I could not move a hand to save my life from the dagger of my old friend, Colonel Needham, and——"

"From what?" asked Mehaul sharply.

"The dagger of Needham, or of our friend 'Torney Gordon."

"You don't mean to say!" burst out Mehaul, and raising himself erect, as the light leaped from his eyes, "they were here."

"They were, indeed! Your sudden coming alone saved us. I was about to tell you when——"

"Merciful heaven! Watt, why did you not tell me that afore?"

Grasping in his hand the hatchet, whose sides gleamed

with a red tinge, Mehaul darted through the doorway, swiftly followed by Murrough. In a few minutes they returned.

"Watt, Watt, why didn't you tell me in time—only a moment earlier? They have got clean off. Two of the greatest scoundrels that ever oppressed a country. Oh! for five minutes before 'em wid this!"

In his anger and vexation Mehaul uplifted his hatchet.

"Ay, gone they are, ridin' as hard as they can to Ross. Sorra many they have to accompany 'em, anyhow; those that kem out wid 'em in the mornin' they'll find some thrubble in takin' back now."

There was a significance in his words which Watt understood.

"That was the meaning of these shots and the outcries I heard."

"Ay, Watt," said Mehaul, "That was it. They wor here sarchin' for you, I suppose, or on some other mischief, wid a lot of their sojers, when we caught sight av their red coats. The two got off; salvation to me! but I'll never forgive meself for it—but the rest, faix, if they want 'em, they'll find 'em stretched on the grass outside, an' among the fallen stones, wid a taste of this for quietin' medicine."

"Well, what do you intend doing, Mehaul?"

"Ay, that's the question to ax. It's nighhand forgettin' id I was. We must be off at once."

"Where to?"

"To Ross."

"I thought Ross was defended by the military."

"So it is—for a little while longer. But we're not goin' there exactly. We're goin' to Corbet Hill, about a mile from it. We'll be in Ross in a day or two."

"Will you be able to take it?"

"Arrah to be sure we will," said Mehaul triumphantly. "Haven't we beaten 'em everywhere. Where is the North Cork? Lyin' bleachin' their bones on Oulart Hill. It was not women or children they had to fight there. Where's those that defended Enniscorthy? Dead in its streets, or retreated to Waxford. I tell you what I have often tould you afore, sorra the sojer ever wore a red coat can stand afore Waxfordmen. Are you able to walk?"

"I'm afraid not—indeed, I'm sure not."

"Where are you hurt?"

"I cannot say."

"You had a narrow escape ov id."

"I daresay I had, but I don't remember. What happened?"

"A couple of barrels of powder, when the house took fire, blew up, and blew house and sojers into smithereens. But we have not a moment to lose—we must be goin', and we must bring you away somehow."

"And Nisthaus?"

"Oh, faix, you may lave Nisthaus to Murrough's care. She'll come wid us. Where else would she go?"

"Knock-raheen is burnt down, then?"

"Every stick and rafter ov id. For the matter ov that, so is every house for miles around. But we have paid them back for id, an' plaise God, we'll give 'em more of that same kind ov coin afore long."

"Poor Grace!" said Watt reflectively.

"You needn't fret about her. I'll engage she's safe an' sound wherever she is. Musha," said Mehaul, as he lifted the hatchet once again over his head. "I'll never forgive meself that these two villains got off. Wasn't it the pity? They had better clear out of Ross, too, afore we get there."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE BATTLE OF ROSS.

THE morning sun threw its brightest rays over far-famed Corbet Hill. A flood of sunshine fell upon the hill, upon the green fields around, and upon the white town that lay beyond them. Early as was the hour the campers-out on the hill-side were astir, and from many parts the bugle note could be heard summoning the various districts and baronies to their own banners; and cries of command arose in many quarters.

Here long lines of pikemen stood in array; in front of them and to the right the division of Shelmaliers stood resting on their guns, mutely watching the town, and heedless of

the hum and confusion that arose behind them, as the townlands, districts, and baronies settled into their places.

Beyond in the distance, but easily distinguished by the naked eye, stood one of the principal entrances of the town —the Three Bullet Gate, so called because each of the three piers that formed it was surmounted by a huge stone ball. Through the gates could be seen the dark mouths of the guns facing the insurgent's position, and behind them, massed in heavy battalions, the red lines of soldiers.

As yet, however, all was quiet between the opposing forces; no warring sound broke the peaceful stillness of the early summer morning; and the sun poured down his pleasant rays on the green fields around, and on camp and town, in undisturbed tranquility. The Barrow, in the distance, gleamed like a ribbon of burnished gold, as it poured its stately volume to the sea.

"There will be soon tough work at that gate," said Watt, as he glanced with professional eye, where the mouths of the cannon lay in sleeping and sullen silence. He was leaning on Mehaul's arm, and though still very weak had considerably recovered since his arrival at the camp.

"Not much work for the hands that are here," said Mehaul, glancing proudly around.

"I don't know that," said Watt. "That is a strong position, and a little would make it well-nigh impregnable. An abbatis of felled trees, for instance, would leave time for their cannon to play on the masses advancing, and cause tremendous losses. The idiots haven't thought of that, though."

"They would find it more to their taste in burning houses over poor innocent creatures and shooting helpless men. They'll soon get a taste ov id themselves just to see how they'll like id. What's that they're doing?"

A column of soldiers had moved out through the gate, and were busily engaged in some employment.

"They're doing what I suggested a few minutes ago. They are constructing rifle pits and abbatis." said Watt. "In a few hours it will take thousands of lives to capture it."

"Are you sure that's what they're at?" asked Mehaul eagerly

"Sure? Why, of course, I am. Any soldier knows that with half an eye."

"That must be stopped."

"Well, I should say yes if you want to save the lives of your people, or mean to take the town."

"Stay a moment, Watt. Will you wait for a minit or two while I'm away?"

"Certainly, but don't be too long."

"No," said Mehaul, as he hurried away, his eyes bent on the ground in deep thought, "I will not."

Mehaul hastened to the tent of the General commanding the rebel troops. He found him surrounded by a number of subordinate officers, all eagerly discussing some proposed plan. Room was immediately made for him, for he was well known to most of the local leaders, and there was that of vigour and fire in his eye and countenance now that denoted something unusually important.

"What is it now, Mehaul?" asked one. "What news do you bring?"

"Bad news, unless it is taken in time," replied Mehaul.

"How is that? What do you mean? Explain yourself."

"They are strengthening the defences of the gate," said Mehaul, hurriedly, "and if they are allowed to carry on their work for half an hour more all the men on Corbet Hill will not take it."

"You hear that, General," said the officer, turning around to where a small, delicate-looking man, dressed in green and gold uniform, stood, the centre of an excited group. Mehaul had never seen him before, and as he glanced at his pale, hesitating, undecided features, his heart sank within him.

"This is no man to lead a rebel army," was his first despairing expression; and the next was, "Are we always to be cursed by worthless leaders?" But the current of his thoughts was broken as the General turned round and inquired in a sharp, querulous voice, "Well, what is it?"

"He says they are strengthening the defences of the gate, and there is not a moment to be lost. Is not that so?"

"They are already at work," said Mehaul in reply; "and if they are not stopped at wanst it will take a thousand more

Wexford lives to take it. Every minute for the next hour will cost a score of men to the cause."

"You hear that, General?" said the officer.

"Pooh!" said the General, in a halting, nervous manner; "he knows nothing about it. It would be against all the precedents laid down in books on war to attack a town without first calling on it to surrender."

"I hardly think that applies to a case of insurrection," said the officer, with a smile that was blended of amusement at the etiquette of his leader, and of deep chagrin at his folly. "Besides, if they are really strengthening the defences it is clear that they are not inclined to surrender, and it will be a case of wasted opportunities."

"There is no certainty that they are. Not having done so before, they would scarcely do so now."

"But they are," said Mehaul, resolutely; and the contrast between his massive features and stern eyes, afire with strength and determination, and the weak and undecided countenance of the insurgent leader, was extreme. "Watt o' the Crosses says so; and he knows. Who better?"

"Watt o' the Crosses?" said the General, inquiringly.

"The young French Colonel who led the men on Oulart Hill." explained the officer. "No more capable judge there could be, and if he says so I think there is no need to go beyond it." The General had heard of Watt, had heard of the high position he had attained in the French army; had further heard of his skilful defence of Oulart Hill, and was, therefore, inclined to attach importance to his opinion. But like all weak men, he still clung to the ideas he himself possessed, and effected in his mind a sort of compromise between the urgent and prompt action insisted upon by those around him, and the formal and polite negotiation he wished himself to carry out.

"We shall, in that case," said he, after some moments of reflection and indecision, "instead of waiting for the forenoon, send our bearer now. If they do not accede to our demands we shall then attack the town."

"By that time—it will take probably a couple of hours negotiation—it will cost the lives of hundreds of men additional to storm it should the call to surrender be refused," said the officer indignantly.

"It cannot be helped: it is the chances of war," said the General, terminating the interview; "things must be carried on regularly."

With a breast torn with rage, and vexation, and disappointment, and fear, Mehaul returned to the place he had left.

It was with difficulty he could force his way through the crowding multitudes that were moving and gathering in every direction on the hillside. He had just gained Watt's side, after a considerable delay occasioned by these difficulties, when a hoarse cheer arose from ten thousand voices.

Watt looked around.

"Well, Mehaul, what news? What's the cheering for? What has happened?"

"Look yonder," said Mehaul, pointing to the valley that dipped quietly beneath them and between them and the town, wherein a horseman was proceeding at full speed.

"Yes; what?"

"That horseman!" said Mehaul.

"Yes. I see him. A capital rider he is. How that fellow sits his horse. Who is he? Where is he going to?"

"He is going," said Mehaul, "to demand the surrender of the town."

"Where is the flag of truce? Oh, yes, I see! Bravo! How finely he took that jump. It is a sabruer in our army he should be. Hallo! What is that?"

The horseman that they had been watching, and that indeed thousands of those on the hill watched too with glistening eyes and beating hearts, had lifted himself out of the dip in the valley, and, surmounting the brow of the hill, flew across the level plain intervening between him and the Three Bullet Gate, with the stretch and level pace and speed of a greyhound, taking ditches and hedges as they came in his way.

Evidently the watchers and redcoated workers at the gate had seen him and had been startled by his appearance, for they quickly retired behind it—incited thereto probably also by the excited cheers that followed from the hill at every leap of the flying herald.

"What's that, Mehaul? What has happened?" cried Watt, again as a puff of smoke arose from the crowd at the

Three Bullet Gate, and the quick thud of a musket shot came on their listening ears.

Mehaul made no answer. He stood for a second, as if turned into a stone, in watching silence. Similarly an unbroken silence descended with the swiftness of lightning on the gathered crowd of insurgents.

For a moment, however, only. For in a second more, even whilst they looked and listened, the horseman dropped the white flag he carried, threw up his arms in the air, swayed a moment unsteadily in his saddle, then reeled and fell.

The steed, freed from the rider's grasp, and startled by the quick report and flash, wheeled round and galloped back.

"He's shot! He's killed! They've murdered him!" broke with one voice from ten thousand throats—a hoarse diapason that arose with singular and striking effect on the morning air.

"It cannot be," said Mehaul, clutching Watt's arm.

"I fear it is!" said Watt, whose eyes were fixed with great intentness on the scene before him. "They have shot the bearer of the flag of truce! That's cowardly work. I never saw the like of that before—even where a town had been for months bombarded into surrendering—and where shattered and starving men might be tempted to do deeds of vengeance! Mehaul—I say—Mehaul! where are you going?"

But Mehaul answered him not. Leaping on a large boulder that stood near, he shouted at the top of his voice—

"Men of the Duffrey! and all that hear me! do you see that? Murder, under your eyes! Not content with burning our houses and shooting the young, an' the old, an' the innocent, they now shoot down one ov ourselves carrying a flag to 'em. Will you stand this, men of the Duffrey? Will you stand here while the murderers mock you from their gates?"

As Mehaul in his excitement, swung his hatchet over his head a fierce cry of "No!" answered him.

"No!" he echoed. "All that say 'No' folly me. We'll lave, afore the sun is higher in the sky, these ruffians that they'll never take an innocent life again. We'll give 'em a chance of meetin' men now. Folly me—to sweep these

scoundrels away—to give their corpses to the flames of the thatch an' their sowls to the eternal flames! Folly me, men of Duffrey, folly me!"

The hoarse voice of the speaker, his swarthy face swollen with vengeance and passion, his exciting attitudes, and the look of vengeance and wrath that displayed itself, as three times he swung his hatchet around his head, had a tremendous effect on his hearers.

The frantic thirst for vengeance that possessed him seemed to have communicated itself to them. The pikemen lifted their pikes high in the air, whilst the musketeers looked to the priming of their guns.

Almost before he had time to know what was happening, Watt felt a tremendous on-rush behind and beside him, the all-sweeping rush of thousands of men in a body. His eye had been turned for a moment, taking heed of the motion of the troops at the Three Bullet Gate, who, he saw, had rapidly retreated behind their defences, when he was caught up by the onward movement and carried, as a mountain wave might lift him, forward.

Almost before he had time to free his hands and arms from the dense mass around him, the valley had been gained, the brow reached, and right before them shining in the morning sun, stood the Three Bullet Gate, and sloping behind it, the town of New Ross."

"How quiet and how nice it looks," was the first impression, as his eyes in the nearer approach rested upon it. But as he thought so a red flash lit up the gate, a cloud of smoke curled up above its white piers, and a rush of grape beside him left numbers strewn about him. Again the earth trembled with the boom that swept along it as another of the heavy guns, fired in quick succession, flashed forth its death-dealing missives.

"This is rather hot work!" thought Watt as the crowd, having room to scatter, gave him power to regain his feet. "These guns will play havoc among these crowded masses. It will be pure slaughter unless they carry them promptly by assault!"

The excitement of the hour had done more to restore his strength and vigour than weeks of convalescence. The old fire of battle was in his brain, the old light of victory and

glory in his heart. All considerations of personal suffering and weakness were lost in the overwhelming moment.

The moving mass seems to have paused in face of the withering fire, and to be scattered pointlessly.

Seizing a pike that had fallen from the hands of one of the fallen insurgents,, Watt ran a short distance in front and called aloud—

"To the gates, men! You will be shot down helplessly here. To the gates and over them. Pikemen, forward!"

"It's Watt o' the Crosses," cried one or two who knew his face, as they cheered his words.

"Aye, Watt o' the Crosses. We'll follow him!" burst from the crowd. One way or another—probably through Murrough or Mehaul—all had heard of their returned countryman and his brave honours won abroad. The name of the French army was synonymous with bravery and victory, and they were at once prepared to follow him.

"Follow me, boys, to the Three Bullet Gate!"

With an activity which a few hours before he would have thought impossible, he ran towards the defended entrance. But there were others there swifter than he, and whilst the earth trembled, and the daylight paled before the red light that leaped from the belching cannon, he could see among the wreathing clouds of smoke that rose heavily upwards the forms of pikemen, clambering over the walls and battlements or leaping therefrom among the crowds of soldiers at the other side.

Scenes like this had been nothing unusual in his career. He had not won the Cross of the Legion of Honour without having passed through the rolling smoke of the battlefield; yet as he looked forward he could not help on the instant thinking—

"What a scene for a painter."

The battlements were crowded with climbing figures; through the smoke that formed a semi-visible curtain before the guns he could see the forms of struggling men behind the gates; once more the guns vomited forth fire and smoke; and hissing grape-shot; a volley of musketry ringing sharply after, repeated once, and twice, and thrice, was answered by a cheer of defiance as increasing hundreds in hot haste clambered up the battlements and leaped forward after their

brothers; and in a whirlwind of smoke, dust, groans, cries, and clashing weapons, the defences of the Three Bullet Gate were won and carried!

A sudden deflection of those to his left enabled him to see in that direction. He stayed his progress for a time as a striking sight met his eye.

A party of the Antient Britons—a regiment of horse then quartered in Wexford, but notorious for its wanton outrages on the people—formed part of the defenders, and were half concealed in a laneway to the left, behind whin bushes and other shrubs. They had escaped the ken of the first rushers-on, who had only eyes and ears for those at the gate in their immediate front.

But those coming after had caught sight of their helmets and the sheen of their bared sword blades. In a moment the remembrance of what they and theirs had suffered from these men rushed into the minds of those who saw them. In a second more, with one impulse, their course was taken, and they were bearing down on the doomed cavalrymen.

Waiting only to see the flash of their swords and the gleam of the pikeheads as assailant and assailed met in the death struggle—in the narrow laneway—Watt passed on towards the gate, where now the work of death went on fast and furious.

He had some difficulty in climbing the battlements. He had time enough to remark that the cannon barring the gate lay silent, and that the clash of fighting men had retreated down the slope towards the town.

"The day is won," he thought; "they have carried the gate in a rush! If"——

His thoughts were interrupted by a form that leaped swiftly past him across the battlements. He carried slung over his shoulder, a hatchet whose blade shone wet and red through the smoke, and in his hand a broken pike blade.

Watt knew him at once.

"Mehaul!" he cried.

But the form had vanished in the smoke in the direction of the town.

As he went further, all order and coherence of formation seemed lost. Hundreds of infuriated insurgents were pouring through the streets. Here and there red-coated forms were

lying thickly around the gate, and at intervals where they had stood to fight in the retreat. In all similar places the dead bodies of insurgents strewed the ground here and there and the fires of burning houses made the streets so hot as to be impassable. But around some of these burning houses, and in the glare and smoke of the fire, a fierce fight still went on between those within and those without—between defenders and assailants.

A girl's form at one of the burning houses attracted his attention, and he was about to interfere, when suddenly a voice called him. He turned round.

An officer in uniform was in the centre of two or three pikemen, who were preparing to despatch him.

"Watt Malone—Watt o' the Crosses." The cry came sharply on his ears.

In the hurry of the moment, amid the smoke and confusion, Watt could scarcely recognise the speaker.

"Colonel Victor!"

"Colonel Victor!" repeated Watt in astonishment, but promptly staying the hands that were uplifted against him, adding—

"He is a friend to the people."

"That looks like it," said the men, who were from the Carlow side, and who did not know him, pointing to his uniform.

"But he is. Don't touch him! At your peril don't. I claim him as my prisoner."

"You!" said one of the men contemptuously. "Who are you?" in no wise disposed to show favour to anyone wearing the hated uniform, or in sympathy with it.

"Stand aside—whoever you are! He is our prisoner," said one of the men savagely, at the continued interruption, and raising his pike.

But a friendly hand warded off the thrust from the captive officer, and an authoritative voice cried—

"Yield up your prisoner! I am Mehaul-na-Corriga! Stand aside!"

The men, however unwilling to let their prisoner go, yielded to the command of Mehaul, whose name was well known to them, and whose appearance betokened the part he had taken in the work of the morning.

Quickly stripping the long frieze coat off one of the fallen insurgents, Mehaul handed it to Colonel Victor.

"If you value your life, put this on quickly and folly me. The town is won, and the sojers are in full retreat across the wooden bridge."

"Better lift the bridge after them," said Watt, "the confusion here after some time will be enormous."

The bridge leading across the Barrow to the county Kilkenny was a long wooden one, made so as to be lifted in the centre to admit the large vessels which floated up the river to Ross to pass through. Watt instinctively knew the value of this defence, and the necessity for having the bridge raised.

"See that that is done, Mehaul. Where to now, Colonel?"

"To the river?"

"To the river."

"Yes—to the gunboat. The roar of the battle brought me into the streets."

"A dangerous venture, Colonel. Our people are in a white heat of vengeance for the sufferings they have endured. But we must be quick."

"Yes, av coorse—come at wanst," said Mehaul.

"You know the way through these burning streets."

"I do well," said Mehaul. "Folly me."

They did follow him in single file, swiftly as they might. Here and there sounds of strife and fury arose from houses and windows, where stray parties of soldiers who had missed the main body had sheltered themselves. Fire and flame leaped from the windows, whilst with sledge hammers and battering rams the assailants thundered against the doors, forcing an entrance.

At other times hurrying parties of passing men scanned them rapidly; but, as most of them knew Mehaul, and Colonel Victor's overcoat hid his uniform, they passed without molestation.

"This is the way. Yonder is the quay and the river. See! the gunboat is shifting down the river. You're safe now, Colonel Victor," said Mehaul.

At this moment, and just as they entered on the narrow laneway or street that led to the river, there came thundering past a disorganised body of cavalry—composed of the

yeomen of the county—a body scarcely less hated than the North Cork themselves. The stories of their hangings, pitch-cappings, and floggings, their reckless shootings by the wayside as they rode through the country, and their purposeless house-burnings—were household words in every village and hamlet. They seemed to be making a rapid escape from the victorious insurgents, and, having failed to come in with the main body, now in hurried retreat through the county Kilkenny, were making their escape in this direction.

In the act of abutting on the street the little group had not heard their advance until they were close on them. Before they had time to assume even a position of defence they were ridden over and scattered.

"Are you hurt, Mehaul?" asked Watt.

"No. Are you?"

"No. Did you see the first horseman?"

"Aye did I. The devil confound him! And his companion too!"

"The first was——"

"Birchwood Gordon."

"So I thought in the short glance I got. And the second?"

"Was Needham—Needham the burner, Watt! It's a mortal pity if they escape. But look here, Watt! What is this?"

He pointed to the form of the Colonel extended on the ground, his white hair dabbled with fast flowing blood.

"He is wounded. The villains struck him as they passed," said Watt, as he sought to lift the wounded gentleman.

"Is he badly hurt, Mehaul?"

"I fear he is—he is senseless at any rate."

"Try to lift him with me. Bear him down to the quay side. Wrap his coat about him and hide his uniform. It is a dangerous sight in the streets of Ross this moment."

They had with some difficulty lifted him out of the main thoroughfare and into the laneway, when a sudden rush of horsemen passed them. This time, however, it was a band of pikemen on horses taken from the slaughtered cavalry, each horseman carrying a musketeer behind him.

"They're after the scoundrel," shouted Mehaul. "Hurrah,

boys! folly 'em. Come up wid 'em, if it took you twenty miles to do id. Hurrah!"

In a moment the pursuers were gone, and naught but the thunder of the horses' hoofs above the din and noise of the cheering of the victors, and the crash of falling and burning houses, came on their ears.

"They'll never burn another roof, I warrant you," said Mehaul as he watched their rapid progress in the distance. "We must bear him gently, Watt. The villain's sword cut deeper than I thought. Wait a moment till I bind my handkerchief around it."

They laid down their burthen on the stones of the laneway, and, whilst Watt gently supported his head on his knees, Mehaul bound up the bleeding wound.

"He'll do better now, Watt. If we can only get a boat, and get out ov the way ov the shot——Hello!"

A hand was laid on his arm pretty sharply, and as he looked up Mehaul perceived standing over him his old acquaintance, Charles Churchington, Traveller No. 1.

"Hallo!"

Traveller No. 1 silenced this exclamation with a peremptory wave of his hand.

"No time for idle talking," said he quietly. "When did this happen?"

"A few minutes ago. The sword of your friend, Colonel Needham," answered Mehaul, as he saw him glance at the bandaged wound.

"Can we—is he able to bear removal?"

"Yes, he is now."

"Then let me help you to lift him. There is furious work going on yonder," as he nodded to the streets "Heaven help him if we cannot get him away quickly."

"What do you mean?" asked Mehaul with anxiety.

"They are already mad with triumph and victory. They are now maddening themselves with drink. Have they no leader or guide?"

"Here, boys, hurry," said Mehaul, as they bore the form of the Colonel downwards to the river.

"Where is there a boat? Oh, yes, here. Lay him down quietly, and row him to the gunboat. I must go back."

"Not for a moment, Mehaul. You must come with

us," said a voice at the tiller, which made both himself and Watt stand up in amazement.

"What! Dick-na-Raheen!" cried both together.

"The same," said Dick. "And now, gentlemen, will you pull swiftly? Your friends have gained the day, Mehaul, and gallantly they've won it."

The boat was swiftly pushed out, but Mehaul clutching his hatchet once more, leaped backwards to the quay.

"I'll see you again, Watt!" he said.

"Come back, Mehaul!" cried Watt.

"Mehaul! Mehaul!" cried Dick-na-Raheen.

But Mehaul had passed swiftly from the quayside, and, even whilst they were calling, had disappeared in the direction of the heavy cloud of smoke and fire that curtained the town.

In a few moments more they were beside the gunboat. To lift the wounded officer from the skiff to the cabin was but the work of a moment.

A cry of anguish arose from two beautiful girls as they saw borne in the wounded form.

But a cry, not of sorrow or anguish, but of love and surprise, came from another fair girl's lips; and in the darkness and gloom of the ill-lighted cabin, Watt, when he turned round, saw standing beside him, that fair form which for many years had been seldom absent from his thoughts. In an instant Grace Cottrell was in his arms!

CHAPTER XXXII.

SCULLABOGUE.

When Mehaul left his companions his whole thoughts and anxiety were upon getting back to the main street of the town, in which the banners of his victorious countrymen now waved. He felt for their inexperience and want of leaders, for their reckless rejoicing; and dreaded a surprise. He felt, too, that as a matter of precaution, the wooden bridge over the river should have been lifted, and so interpose a barrier between the town and the retreating military.

Full of those notions, he was rushing forward up the same laneway they had descended. He had reached the spot where Colonel Victor had been wounded, when in his extreme precipitancy, his foot struck against the dead body of a man, and he fell across him heavily.

As he recovered himself two or three horsemen came galloping up.

"Murrough! Murrough!" shouted Mehaul, as he recognised one of the men.

"What, you, Mehaul!" said the man addressed, whose face was black and grimy with dust and smoke and powder. "Is this you?"

"Yes," said Mehaul. "Where are you going?"

"There is bad work going on near Scullabogue," said Murrough breathlessly. "We have not a minute to waste. There is an idle horse behind. Jump on him and folly us."

Mehaul remembered the flight of Birchwood Gordon and of Colonel Needham and their associates. His resolution was taken in a moment. He seized the draggling reins of the runaway charger, and leaping on his back, flew after his comrades.

"Where these villains are there's sure to be bad work!" he thought.

The roar of the victorious multitude in the town died on his ears by degrees as he spurred forward. The stately gunboat on the Barrow, dropping downwards on the tide, met his eye. But he thought of none of these things.

His whole thoughts were on what was before him.

Half an hour's swift riding brought him in sight of his friends; and as he came up with them on the side of a declining brow a strange sight met his eyes.

A low thatched building lay on one side of the road. Thither with the point of their bayonets the retreating soldiers were driving before them a crowd of terrified women and children, whom the noise and uproar of the battle and the uncertainty of how it might terminate had brought from their homes in the direction of the town—whence the thunder of guns and artillery from early morning had come with awful bodement on their ears!

"What are they doing, Murrough?" asked Mehaul, as he

came up with the others as they stood watching silently the work that was going on before them.

"Heaven knows what the devils are up to," said Murrough.

"How many men have you here?" asked Mehaul.

"About ten or twelve."

"All good men?"

"All. Every man ov 'em."

"Then they'll never—these villains afore us I mean—go back to Wexford again."

"How will you prevent them? They'll run the minit they see us."

"Do you see that wood yonder?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, Murrough, let seven or eight, dismounted, come with me. Let them carry their pikes and muskets. We'll want both. We'll get there afore them."

"I think you're right, Mehaul. I'll be one ov 'em meself."

In a few minutes the required number of men had dismounted, leaving injunctions with the others what to do, and were swiftly descending the hillside under cover of the hedges. In a short time they had gained the shelter of the wood and passed it; and taking up a position at an angle of the road, were busily engaged barricading the latter with bushes and branches of trees which Mehaul with his ready hatchet and muscular arm had soon lopped off.

Whilst they were thus engaged a tremendous cry—a cry so startling that it sent the blood rushing back on their hearts and made them stand suddenly inactive—burst on their ears. A cry—a despairing cry of many voices!

At the same moment the rush of the horsemen was heard approaching.

"Now, boys," said Mehaul, "ready with the guns. Fire when they come within twenty yards, and then take your pikes. Don't let a man ov 'em pass!"

They had not long to wait. The horsemen, some score or more, were coming at breathless speed.

Kneeling behind the broken branches piled on the road, the marksmen took steady aim; and as the galloping troop came forward a sudden volley emptied the saddles of the

foremost. Some of the others in their headlong speed stumbled over the fallen horses, but the rest, in their utter haste still rushed forward.

"Your pikes now, boys!" cried Mehaul.

He had not time to say more when the foremost was on him, having leaped over the barricade.

Darting a little aside, Mehaul received the charger, as he alighted, on the point of his pike, The horse badly wounded, stumbled and fell.

The fall was not so quick, however, but that his rider had time to leap to the ground, and drew a short dagger from his breast. Mehaul staggered with the shock of the horse, and fell. He rose to his knees quickly, but not until the horseman was upon him with his dagger.

"Gordon the villain!" shouted Mehaul, as he grasped whilst on his knees, with one hand the dagger and sought with the other to loose the hatchet that was fastened over his shoulder.

"Mehaul, the smith—you croppy!" cried the horseman as with a powerful effort he wrested the weapon from the smith's grasp and plunged it into his side.

With vigorous suddenness the smith clutched his hand, to prevent his striking a second blow, and raised himself to his feet. At once he grappled with him.

But his head reeled and his eyes swam, and his hold relaxed. The Attorney shook him off and prepared to strike again; but at the moment a pistol shot, aimed at Mehaul, struck him in the back!

The bullet passed through his heart. He threw up his arms, dropped his dagger, and falling helplessly against Mehaul, who was himself reeling with weakness, bore him to the ground. As Mehaul's weakening eyes looked upwards he saw Colonel Needham with smoking pistol in hand urge his horse over them both and dash madly forward!

The struggle was not of long duration. Two or three of the horsemen, amongst whom was the fortunate Colonel, got safely past the barricade; the rest were lying before it.

But in the summer light the smoke of a burning house rose fiercely upwards, and the same despairing cry they had heard before rose with greater intensity on the air.

Heedless of their wounded companions and of their dying

enemies, Murrough and those remaining rushed in that direction.

An awful sight met their eyes!

The low thatched building into which they had seen the yeomen drive the people at the point of the sword, was in flames.

It had been fired by the retreating soldiers. Long before they could get within reach the cries had ceased, the burning thatch had fallen in, and the holocaust was over.

Scullabogue barn, long to be remembered and shuddered at of winter nights in Wexford, with its hundred inmates, had been burned to ashes!

But they were fated to see a sight still more disastrous—if not so pitiful—on their return to the streets of the stormed town: for where the flag of the rebels had been flying in victory and triumph, that of the hated soldiery had again risen; and the cause so gallantly fought for, and won, in the morning, was irretrievably lost, ere yet the setting sun faded in the western skies!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CONCLUSION.

We draw the curtain over the scenes of our story as the night descends on the blood-stained streets of Ross. The bright hopes of Ireland were quenched therein; and thence-afterwards the story of rebellion becomes a narrative of suffering, ruin, and loss that our pen refuses to describe.

For many weeks Colonel Victor lay on his bed of suffering, assiduously nursed by his two daughters. Similarly, the excitement through which Watt had passed proved too much for his frame, weakened by wounds, and he lingered for some time in brain fever, between life and death. Occasionally news came to the gunboat, where it lay tossing on the fair waters of Passage, of the failing fortunes of the Wexfordmen, and their gallant but unavailing fight for freedom. In little more than a month their cause was drowned in blood, and the bravest effort of modern times served but to add another to the long list of disappointed hopes.

Some months afterwards, and some weeks after the vessel had reached England, there was a joyous triple marriage ceremony in a stately church in Paris, where Watt o' the Crosses was united to Grace Cottrell, Charles Churchington to Alice Victor, and Lieutenant Cottrell to her sister Mary. Gallant generals and handsome ladies honoured the Madeline with their presence on the occasion, but I am told that by universal assent of all present no lovelier face or fairer form ever knelt before the high altar of Our Lady than her's who so long brightened the homestead of Knock-raheen.

Traveller No. 1 was often heard to remark that of all the journeys he ever took that one on Christmas Eve, in the memorable year '97, was the most eventful and the most fortunate.

Dick-na-Raheen rose to high position in the Navy, and when he retired from the service, succeeded Colonel Victor in his estates. His family now hold wealth and high rank in the county whence he once fled as a felon.

As for Watt o' the Crosses, he remained with his handsome wife in France, where he resumed his old profession. And when the dusk of a June evening, seventeen years after threw its shadows over a lost emperor and a ruined nation on the plains of Waterloo, General Walter Malone and his division of French cavalry were the last to turn their faces to Paris and their backs to the foe. His descendants are to this day amongst its bravest names and stand high among its chivalry.

Murrough, with Nisthaus for his wife, lived, when the troubles had passed away, many a pleasant year in Knock-raheen, for Grace and Dick had by common consent agreed that the two faithful servitors should be the heritors of the steading which they were destined never more to occupy.

Mehaul, with his accustomed bravery, went through all the bloody scenes of the Rebellion, and when it had been crushed out by overwhelming forces, for many weary months wandered a hunted outlaw on the Blackstairs. Curiously enough, when hard pressed, as often happened, he made his lair by the ruined hut on the mountain side, where he had had the memorable adventure related in the earlier papers of this story; and to the kindness, care, and watchfulness of his invisible acquaintances he confidently ascribed

many an almost miraculous escape from the pursuing soldiery. Finally, through the strenuous efforts of Colonel Victor and Charles Churchington, he received a full pardon, and practised many a year afterwards at his trade in the Forge of Clohogue.

He was a very old man—close upon ninety years of age—but still erect and vigorous, when, one summer's evening, weary with fishing the streams that led into the Slaney, I sought the welcome shelter of the Crosses, still bright and attractive as in the troubled times. On a seat outside the door, in the mellow glow of the August evening, Mehaul and I foregathered over tumblers (that were not entirely of water), and then I learned the story I have here, in such fashion as the reader wots of, put together. And I remember well the eerie feeling that crept over me as Mehaul, in tones which indicated his thorough belief in his story, told me of his singular interview on the mountain with the dead men on that Christmas Eve, so many years before.

Perhaps I should say that Shaymus Morissey afterwards became proprietor of the Crosses by marrying Watt's pretty sister, Kitty. "It's little I thought," he used often to say, "when I was trying to frighten the traveller by calling after him on Christmas Eve, that he was to give me such a fright that same night. But who would have thought it was Dick-na-Raheen that was in it?"

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